

NURSE-LINK INITIATIVE

85. Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO to the Minister for Health:

Has the minister's recent letter to every nurse on the Western Australian nursing register had any impact in addressing the concerns of existing government employees or in getting non-working nurses back to work?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question. Since the launch of Nurse-Link this year, 525 phone calls have been received on the toll-free number. Of that number, about 350 calls were prompted by the letter I sent to every hardworking nurse in this State and responses were received from nurses who are currently not working and who we would like to see return to the system. In addition, more than 100 letters and e-mails have been received. A total of 106 nurses who had previously left the system have been funded into registration programs. Eighty nurses have been funded for refresher courses. I have been approached by many nurses across the State over the past few weeks to thank me personally for this initiative. The common theme is that this is the first time nurses have been universally acknowledged and valued by a Government in this State. Those sorts of comments make me proud.

In response to the letter, advice on entry and refresher courses, scholarships, enterprise bargaining agreement implementation and a host of other issues has been provided to many nurses. I have received valuable feedback from nurses about the need to tackle flexibility in rostering, employment practices, accessibility to child care, violence and bullying within the workplace and an overall consistency in EBA implementation. The government strategy is working, because there was an increase of 325 in the number of nursing full-time equivalents who entered the public sector between July 2001 and July 2002. There is now no doubt that this Government is doing more to revitalise nursing and the nursing profession than has happened in the past 10 years. The State Secretary of the Australian Nursing Union, Mark Olson, and I do not always agree on these issues. However, we agree on one particular issue; he was quoted in *The Australian* of 9 September as stating that the \$280 million EBA that had been signed off was -

... the best deal offered to nurses over the past decade

I am pleased that I sent that letter because it indicates that at long last we are moving forward and getting nurses back into the public system where they are honoured and valued.