

NURSES, RECRUITMENT

255. Mr BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer to a report in *The West Australian* today that more specialist nurses are leaving the public health system, and ask -

- (1) Has the Government embarked on its promised program to recruit 400 nurses; and, if so, has the total number of nurses in the system increased or decreased in the past six months?
- (2) Does the minister agree that the hospital bed closures, ambulance bypasses and cancellation of surgery happening right now show that the Government has made little or no progress in its promise to revamp the health system?

Mr KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for his question.

- (1) I certified the enterprise bargaining agreement for the nurses today, and I remind the member for Murdoch that this Government pledged and gave a further \$200 million to the EBA, which the Opposition said could be achieved for \$104 million. I do not have the specific figures for nurses at this stage, but every nursing course in the State is absolutely full, and there are waiting lists for people wanting to enter those courses. Fremantle Hospital tells me that it is now able to recruit the number of nurses it wants. That, however, is beside the point. The EBA is designed to undo some of the mistrust and damage caused by the eight years of the previous Government.
- (2) It is somewhat surprising today that, the day after the Government handed back the proposals to the Australian Medical Association, it sees now that the hospital system is all of a sudden in crisis. The practice of denigration that has gone on for eight years seems to be continuing. In relation to ambulance bypasses, all members well know that between June and September every year in this city, the demand for hospital services reaches peak levels. That is the case every day during those months. In six months the present Government - and I am proud to celebrate its first six months in office - has achieved more in health than was achieved in the previous eight years. The reform process is now established. The first layers of bureaucracy have been peeled away to allow the Government to move forward with a proper reform process. All the issues raised by the member for Murdoch will be addressed, but it is a long-term process. The Government knows that it cannot undo eight years of neglect in our fine health system overnight, but it will achieve one of the best health care systems in this country.