

MEDICAL SCHOOL — MIDLAND

421. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Health:

Before asking my question, I acknowledge the teachers and students of Aranmore Catholic Primary School, in the electorate of the member for Perth.

I refer to the announcement on Sunday about Curtin University establishing a medical school in Midland. Can the minister outline how this will increase local doctor capacity in Western Australia?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

The Premier and the Prime Minister announced some excellent news on Sunday about the new medical school in Western Australia—the Curtin medical school. The government has been lobbying for this for more than two years now, and it is fantastic news that it is up and running. It is great news for the eastern suburbs. It is interesting looking through previous reports from the members for Midland and West Swan, both of whom were critical of the government and listing the medical school as one of our broken promises. Clearly, as was said at the time of that debate, we have four years of government.

Ms R. Saffioti: Has it been built yet? Have I missed something?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I have the detailed quote but I have not brought it in.

It is great news that this has been approved. The state government funding and the funding from Curtin University will now progress quickly. The land has been identified already, and we will make sure that the school is developed.

There has been criticism about the issue of where we are going with training. It is absolutely critical that we provide training in this state for those students. As members know, there is a commitment, and that commitment remains, that all Western Australian graduates will be guaranteed a year of internship to make sure that they fulfil the requirements of their degrees. We have the capacity to do that. The numbers approved for the current year were slightly less than the total available, and so we are able to have other students coming in. Remember, it is a five-year course, and the students will not even be coming into the health system as students for at least another four years. It is two years until the program starts, and in their second and third years they usually start spending time in hospitals. The brand-new Midland Public Hospital is right next door to the new medical school and creates a great opportunity. However, this school will operate in a different way. Students will be trained in a much more hands-on manner than we were, spending time with groups such as Silver Chain, and in general practice, learning a lot of hands-on medicine that will make them ideally suited to be general practitioners. I will close with some comments from Professor Con Michael. He has just recently completed a study into the whole training program in Western Australia for medical students and made a number of recommendations about how students are trained and how they can be better directed into the specialties, especially in areas where there is a shortage. He wrote —

The additional graduates are absolutely necessary to meet the future supply requirements for doctors in WA and with the recommended reforms that will lead to innovative clinical training and placement positions being created these graduates can be accommodated in the WA hospital system.

Professor Con Michael is extremely well regarded within the state—an eminent professor—and, having just done this study, his words should carry an enormous amount of weight, and they back up the decision of this government and the federal government to support this medical school. I look forward to the first students graduating in the early 2020s.

Distinguished Visitor — Senator Zhenya Wang

THE SPEAKER (Mr M.W. Sutherland): Before calling for the next question, I welcome into the gallery Senator Wang from the federal Parliament.