

HOSPITALS, FREE NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

1433. Hon. P.G. Pental to the Minister for Health

I refer to the government's policy of free needle exchange which takes place at all public hospitals and ask -

- (a) is it correct that the 'Fitpack' contains the warning that injecting drugs '...may result in jury or death' and that it is also illegal;
- (b) how can nurses be instructed to take part in an illegal activity; and
- (c) will the Minister have these issues investigated with a view to providing nurses and others with some form of advice?

Mr KUCERA replied:

It is assumed that the policy that is referred to is the Department of Health Operational Circular OP 1522/01 (Provision of sterile needles and syringes from rural and regional hospitals to people who inject drugs, 20 December 2001). This Operational Circular requires that all regional and rural hospitals that provide emergency after-hours services provide after-hours access to needles and syringes for people who inject drugs. This service is not an 'exchange' service requiring the return of used injecting equipment but rather an 'availability' service.

- (a) Yes (message actually reads 'may result in injury or death').
- (b) Nurses are not being instructed to take part in an illegal activity. It is the injection of illicit drugs that is illegal, not the provision of sterile needles and syringes through approved programs.
- (c) No. Advice in regard to these issues is provided via training.