

METROPOLITAN HEALTH SERVICE REPORT 2001-02

**564. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:**

I refer the minister to the 2001-02 Metropolitan Health Service report tabled in the House yesterday that clearly shows an increase in costs - a blow-out, in fact - of over \$200 million for the Metropolitan Health Service.

- (1) Is the minister aware that the cost of delivering those services for emergency department outpatients and other patients has risen dramatically, which is contrary to the minister's statements in the House regarding the Health Administrative Review Committee report and bringing tertiary hospital budgets under control?
- (2) Can the minister confirm and assure the House that there will be no curtailment or cancellation of elective surgery in the metropolitan area or any other areas of the State as a result of the massive increase in costs in the city?
- (3) Can the minister assure the House that the budget for country services this year will not be cut as a result of the massive increase in costs in metropolitan teaching hospitals?

**Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:**

- (1)-(3) I fail to see how the member for Murdoch can suggest that references to rising costs are contrary to statements I have made. I have made it clear that health costs across Australia have been increasing exponentially. The key issue is that instead of patching and bandaiding, as happened during the previous eight years, we now have a Treasurer and a Government who deal with cost increases in the health system, and get on with delivering the service.

Mr M.F. Board interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: If the member for Murdoch does not want to hear the answer, I am happy to sit down. If he wants to listen to it, he should show me a little courtesy.

The Government has been saying unrelentingly over the past two years that we face cost increases in the health system generally. We are going through a major reform process, but we still ensure we deliver, and will continue to deliver, emergency services. I remind the member for Murdoch that the Government has delivered the best deal for nurses in over a decade - they are not my words, but those of the nurses. The doctors' deal was achieved not through taxation dodges and devices, but by a straight employment of wage increases, allowances and other conditions applied sensibly and properly in accordance with awards.

Across the board, it is the best deal in the past five to 10 years for the Hospital Salaried Officers Association and other unions. Of course there is an increase in costs, because whether or not the member for Murdoch likes it, that is where the largest pressures are - or has he not been reading the newspapers and his own press releases? As a Government, we are meeting those increases in costs and making sure that people get the services they demand, unlike the previous Government, which took beds out of the system and backed away from its responsibilities.