

HOSPITALS, EXTRA 65 BEDS

959. Mr BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer the minister to the Department of Health's recent announcement that an extra 65 beds will be made available at Perth's tertiary hospitals to ease pressure on emergency departments. The Opposition welcomes that announcement and considers that it is a good thing. However, it raises a number of issues that were not explained at the time of the announcement.

- (1) What additional nursing support will be given to those hospitals as a result of those 65 beds, given that Royal Perth Hospital is already short of 230 nurses, Fremantle Hospital 110 and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital 170?
- (2) Will the nurses working at those hospitals be asked to do extra work when bed-to-nurse ratios are already an issue?
- (3) The cost of operating those beds was not explained in the announcement. As the minister knows, there will be an extra cost. Where will that money come from?
- (4) Will any other service either in the hospitals or the Department of Health be cut to meet the cost of those additional beds?

Mr KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(4) I thank the member for the question because it highlights some of the excellent work now being done by the new management team that has been appointed to the Department of Health. I am pleased to announce that Mr Michael Jackson was appointed today as head of environmental and population health in this State. That is yet another step towards renewing the health service in this State.

No cuts will be made to services, due to some astute management and some realisation of the need to ensure that we are planning appropriately.

Mr Board interjected.

Mr KUCERA: The member for Murdoch should listen to this because winter is approaching and we need to prepare for it. Services will not be cut. The money will be found from within the existing budget. This year, through the astute management of the new management team within the Department of Health, which was appointed in November last year, we have been able to plan properly, methodically and dispassionately for the problems that always arise in winter in this city. This is heading towards dealing with the issue of bypass, which, I remind the member for Murdoch, was introduced by his Government.

Mr Board interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member!

Mr KUCERA: Again, I remind the member for Murdoch that there is a worldwide shortage of nurses. For once, I applaud the federal Government for its announcement this morning about targeting nurses in this year's and next year's immigration intake. We desperately need nurses in this country; we all know that. The figures given by the member for Murdoch are extremely misleading. The shortage of nurses in the full-time equivalent component of the health system is very misleading. Unfortunately, the hospitals in Western Australia, like many other hospitals in this country, have to utilise agency nurses. Many of the existing positions are occupied by agency nurses. I make no secret of that fact. I make no secret of the fact that that is costing us a lot of money. I also make no secret of the fact that I have said to the Department of Health that over the next 12 months, we will work towards alleviating that problem in our public hospitals. We will look towards recruiting nurses and picking up on the issues announced by the federal Government today to ensure that nurses are present within our hospitals in ever-increasing numbers. Whenever we try to change and improve the system in this State, we hear a cacophony of noise from the other side. I am amazed that members opposite can make any noise, because every time we try to make a change, they stick their heads in the sand - where they have been for the past eight years! This is planning for the winter - something that the member for Murdoch needs to think about.