

AMBULANCE BYPASS STATISTICS

54. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I again remind the minister of the Premier's campaign launch speech in which he stated -

When ambulances are forced to drive the streets of Perth to find an emergency ward that can accept patients, that is a crisis.

- (1) Now that we have received the latest ambulance bypass figures, is the minister aware that the situation is even worse than anticipated, and that the length of time that the three metropolitan teaching hospitals are on bypass has increased 100 per cent from July 2001 to July 2002, which is a doubling of the problem in the past 12 months?
- (2) Given that the three metropolitan teaching hospitals have also been on simultaneous bypass eight times since the beginning of this month alone, will the minister admit that he failed to make any progress in meeting the issues in our emergency departments?
- (3) Will the minister also admit that the capital works program announced the other day, which the Opposition accepts is a step forward, will not come into effect for at least two years?

The SPEAKER: Questions and answers are getting too long. I ask those who compose questions to make them briefer rather than longer.

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(3) It may interest the member for Murdoch to know that over the past five days our hospitals have been the quietest they have been for a very long time. People are now starting to wake up to the truth of the issues that have been raised by the Leader of the Opposition - rather, by my counterpart on the other side of the House. The member for Murdoch is not the leader yet as he has not quite got the numbers.

The other day the member for Murdoch referred to the ridiculous situation with general practitioners in this State. It is all very well for the member to talk about a management tool that was introduced by the previous Government, which I do not resile from, but I want to put a few things on the table. I clearly stated last week, and all the emergency doctors have said the same thing, that we are experiencing our worst flu epidemic for three years. The federal Government contributed a further \$40 million to combat meningococcal in this country. However, that will affect only 15 per cent of the cases in this State. In fact, Western Australia will receive only 10 per cent of that money, which is a mere pittance. That is because 85 per cent of all meningococcal cases in this State are caused by a strain different from that for which the federal Government is providing funding. The emergency departments in our hospitals and the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children are under enormous pressure. As I said last week, all of a sudden the member for Murdoch has found out that the Medicare rebate is costly for WA because we cannot employ GPs in our hospitals. I will use Rockingham-Kwinana District Hospital as an example: 70 per cent of presentations at Rockingham hospital are GP presentations, and only 28 per cent are admitted to hospital. Why is that? Members should try to get a GP in Rockingham after hours, or in most peripheral suburbs!

I will refer to some of the figures. The decline in GP bulk-billing rates is putting enormous pressure on our state hospitals. The GP bulk-billing rates have fallen an average of six per cent in the past two years. In the past 12 months, bulk-billing in the Rockingham, Kwinana and Mandurah area has declined by more than 12 per cent. This area has the highest use of public hospital emergency departments per head of population.

I will refer to the level of GP medical payments in Western Australia, which is important when we talk about capital payments. WA is now approximately 10 per cent below the national average, which amounts to a \$25 million shortfall in the money that comes into our public hospital system. It is little wonder that we are struggling with funding for our major hospitals.

Several opposition members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Last week the member for Murdoch talked about contacting his federal colleague about this ridiculous situation in which we cannot take the pressure off our hospitals. What does the federal Liberal Minister for Health and Ageing say in Queensland's *Courier Mail* of 16 August about her state counterparts? She is quoted as accusing her state and territory Labor counterparts of being "experts" in Medicare fraud. She does not say it is a costly exercise. She says that our attempts to change the Medicare rebate system by putting GPs into our hospitals is fraud, whereas the member for Murdoch talks about it being a costly and ridiculous exercise. In the past week alone, there was a clear indication of the pressures on our hospitals.

Several opposition members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Mr Speaker, I will wind up.

I refer to the incidents that the member for Murdoch and *The West Australian* made so much of last week. A communiqué about the Australian incident monitoring system - remember a great deal was made of this by the member for Murdoch - reads -

Hospital management advise they have implemented the Australian Incident Monitoring System (AIMS) -

This relates to the issues raised by the member for Murdoch and a particular emergency doctor last week. To continue -

. . . and the specific issues . . . occurred in late 2000 -

It was December 2000. We did not see that mentioned by the member for Murdoch or by the Press.

Several opposition members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I applaud the people in our hospitals for what they are doing. When in government, members opposite closed 342 beds in the emergency departments of our hospitals -

Several opposition members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister's answer has lasted long enough.