

VISITING MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS

Statement by Minister for Health

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Health) [2.13 pm]: In accordance with Standing Order No 277(1), I table a response, prepared by the Department of Health, to the findings and recommendations contained in the Public Accounts Committee's second report of its inquiry into the use of visiting medical practitioners in the Western Australian public hospital system, which was released on 5 December 2002.

I commend the committee for its detailed examination of VMP arrangements. The report is detailed and raises important issues about the short and long-term role of visiting medical practitioners in delivering services to the people of Western Australia. It also addresses the attendant administrative and financial controls on such arrangements. I am pleased that the committee has recognised the value of fee-for-service VMP arrangements, especially in the country areas of Western Australia. The creation of area health services within the metropolitan area presents opportunities for greater integration of medical services. The appropriateness of the continued use of VMP arrangements in the metropolitan area will continue to be examined.

The committee's report highlights a number of administrative issues to be addressed by the Department of Health. The application of administrative controls in some circumstances requires improvement, a situation the department is actively addressing. The department had identified the need for better systems control on VMP payments. This led to the introduction in June 2000 of a central processing system for VMP accounts, now known as the medical account assessment system. The application of the system across the State is now almost complete. Data holdings are sufficient to allow detailed analysis for audit and workforce purposes. The Department of Health is aware that further work needs to be undertaken. Attendant administrative controls are being improved. Improved integration of accounting and patient record systems is also being considered. To ensure future coordination, the department has recently established a management committee, the VMP fees and conditions of service review committee. This committee will oversight all aspects of, and future requirements for, VMP arrangements. The report I have tabled provides comments and information addressing the issues raised by the committee. Where appropriate it outlines any actions being undertaken to address particular concerns.

[See paper No 828.]