

AUSTRALIAN HEALTH MINISTERS CONFERENCE

898. Mr ANDREWS to the Minister for Health:

Will the minister inform the House of any outcomes from the Australian Health Ministers Conference held last week?

Mr KUCERA replied:

I get very emotive about the kids of our State.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister had not started his answer when there was an avalanche of interjections from members who had not asked the question. I ask members to allow the minister to answer the question.

Mr KUCERA: I thank the member for Southern River for the question, because it is important. I discussed other things with the federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Senator Kay Patterson. There was an air of cooperation that we had not experienced for some time at the federal level.

Mr Barnett: How many meetings have you been to? You have been going for years, have you?

Mr KUCERA: It is not the number of meetings that we attend but the results that we get. That is probably something that members of the previous Government should remember.

The primary concern of all ministers, including the federal minister, is the work force. Every State and Territory faces significant challenges, which are being faced across the world, of shortages of doctors and nurses, especially in rural and remote areas. The State Governments need the assistance of the Commonwealth in this area to ensure that no stone remains unturned in the search for solutions to these problems. Ministers signed off on a national code of practice for autopsies. Members may recall that that issue was raised in this State last year. This State moved ahead with its own code of practice. The Western Australian Government's intention is to issue its own code, but one that is consistent with the national code. The Western Australian code will provide more detail and will comply with the requirements of the Human Tissue and Transplant Act.

The most important issue emerging for the Australian health ministers is the new Australian HealthCare agreement that will operate from 2003-04 to 2008-09. Our intention is to make sure that we inform and educate the community about the HealthCare programs and how they are funded. The community and the Government have high expectations about the capacity of the health system. Hopefully, the new agreement will meet these expectations. I welcome the new air of cooperation we had in our dealings with the federal Government. It is pleasing to see ministers working together to make sure we get the best health outcomes for this State and the country.