

CORONAVIRUS — PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

262. Ms J.J. SHAW to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the impact that COVID-19 is having on supplies of personal protective equipment. Can the minister outline to the house how the McGowan government is ensuring that WA's dedicated hospital staff have access to the highest standard of personal protective equipment? Furthermore, can the minister advise the house how this work is benefiting local businesses?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for the question. It is an important one because, as we know, one of the consequences of COVID-19 is that there is a global rush for supplies of PPE. Despite the fact that we are doing well with keeping infection rates down in Western Australia, we are competing with the rest of the world, who are suffering a crisis of their health systems, in trying to access important personal protection equipment for our health workers. It is important to protect our healthcare workers and our staff. The threat to global supply chains is having a significant impact on our ability to not only undertake COVID-19 related tasks, but also to get back on with the important task of elective surgery and other essential services that are undertaken by the public health system.

It has been absolutely heartening and, in fact, delightful to see the innovation and the work being done by manufacturers in Western Australia under the guidance and leadership of the Chief Scientist, Professor Peter Klinken, to see what we can do ourselves and to see what we can produce in Western Australia to make sure that we are not so reliant on those heavily disrupted supply chains. Recently, I visited a local company in Malaga, in the seat of the Minister for Transport, which is producing high-quality face shields. There is a strong demand for these items, as they protect the healthcare worker from any aerosol-related COVID-19 infections. The local manufacturer, which is headed by Fas from Adarsh Australia, assisted by Dunlop, is to produce up to 10 000 face shields, which will help the WA Health system maintain ongoing supplies. Two types of shields will be produced—standard shields to be used by general staff, as well as a more specialised design for ear, nose and throat surgeons. The new venture has been led by biomedical engineers in the East Metropolitan Health Service in their Centre for Implant Technology and Retrieval Analysis—CITRA—who will oversee the production and sponsor the manufacturing. They are led by Mr David Morrison and his colleagues, who are some of the unsung heroes of our health system. CITRA is a six-member team based at Royal Perth Hospital and is internationally renowned for its expertise in assessing the safety and quality of medical products and devices. This venture will ensure that locally made equipment, which has been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, meets the high safety and quality standards required for hospitals. Members of the team began investigating the feasibility of producing PPE after recognising that their expertise could be applied to assist the local COVID-19 response. This is a great example of how WA businesses are diversifying during these difficult times and how the McGowan government is doing everything we can to support small businesses and keep people employed.

WA Health is also working with other government agencies to streamline the engagement process with potential suppliers of required products. This will reduce our reliance on overseas supply and boost local industry as part of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have already seen manufacturers in Queensland, South Australia, and Victoria re-equipping and re-tooling their businesses to try to provide a safe sovereign supply of facemasks. This is obviously a great example of other industries right across Australia, but particularly here in Western Australia, doing their bit to try to secure a solid supply chain for not only the Western Australian health system, but also other health systems around Australia.

Another example of the way that the McGowan government is supporting local industry is Western Australian business Wild Child Laboratories, which is also based in Malaga, the seat of the Minister for Transport, the member for West Swan, which will produce and deliver 200 000 bottles of hand sanitiser to WA hospitals throughout the year. This will boost the state's supply by up to 40 weeks, based on the 5 000 bottles a week used in our hospital system. Wild Child Laboratories will produce hand sanitiser in alignment with the WA Health specifications, which go beyond the Therapeutic Goods Administration's requirements.

Under the leadership of Professor Peter Klinken we are also looking at the supply, through local manufacturers, of isolation gowns and ventilators in the event that they are needed for the COVID-19 crisis. This is a great example of WA businesses and the McGowan government working together to keep jobs and secure vital PPE for our hardworking healthcare workers.