

HEALTH SYSTEM

**361. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:**

I refer the minister to the Australian Labor Party election policy on access to and quality in public hospitals, which says that Labor will ensure better management of the health system and reform hospital funding arrangements.

- (1) Can the minister confirm that the tertiary hospital sector is running well over budget, to the tune of approximately \$150 million?
- (2) Can the minister also confirm that discussions are being held about scaling back the use of agency nurses over the coming summer, a move that will ultimately result in the closure of beds?
- (3) When will the minister inform the House and the people of Western Australia about the true financial state of our health system and the effect that will have on services?

**Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:**

- (1)-(3) The member for Murdoch is well aware that a budgetary process goes on throughout the year, and hospital budgets and costs will vary. I also remind the member that he himself has made much noise about the fact that we have recently come through the busiest time of the year in the hospital system. It coped extremely well this winter, despite the enormous pressures. We have also just gone through one of the most traumatic and busy periods for emergency departments, not just in this State but in this whole country, as we have dealt with the incidents in Bali. There is an ongoing issue with rising costs in health generally. The federal Government itself is now recognising the enormous pressures on the health system right across this State.

I have made no secret in this House, since the day this Government came into power, that the Government would do everything in its power over the next few years to eliminate wherever possible the use of agency nurses in the health system

Mr M.F. Board: Not bed closures, though.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Obviously we do cut back on beds during the summer months; that is good management. The member for Murdoch knows quite well that the systems put in place by the previous Government still persist. I also remind the member very clearly, and put him and the previous Government on notice, that the Government is now well aware that the previous Government took 342 beds out of the public hospital system and emergency departments. The Government is still dealing with that problem. We have said from day one that we would manage the health system in the way it must be managed. We have a quality health system, which has proved in the past couple of months that it is world class. It will continue to be supported.