

MERREDIN DISTRICT HOSPITAL, SALARIED DOCTOR

285. Mr B.J. GRYLLS to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the Government's refusal to place a salaried doctor in the Merredin District Hospital and the minister's comments in this House on 23 October that to do so would be the death of the town's private practice.

- (1) Is the minister aware that the Cunderdin doctor, who has now commenced part-time practice in Merredin, supported a motion at the Merredin health forum on 16 October requesting that the Department of Health place a salaried doctor at the Merredin District Hospital to cover a period of three months or until a permanent doctor is placed in Merredin?
- (2) If the private doctor in the area believes his part-time practice needs to be supported by a salaried doctor at the hospital, will the minister consider this remedy so that a roster system can be developed?
- (3) Is the minister aware that the Merredin health forum concluded that a lack of permanent doctors is affecting specialist health services, and that the best that people in that town can hope for is a snowball effect once there is a permanent doctor in the town?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(3) First, I express my gratitude to the private operator from Cunderdin. The Department of Health has had discussions with that doctor for quite some time to establish a private practice in Merredin and to support him. However, I stick by the statements I made the other day. If salaried doctors were moved into the hospital at Merredin, it would be the death of private practice. As I recently said to the member for Merredin, I was happy to meet with representatives of the Shire of Merredin the other day. It was a very productive meeting. I wrote to Kay Patterson, the federal minister, and offered two solutions. Both solutions are about making sure that the good people of Merredin who pay their taxes and get a 30 per cent rebate on their tax can access all the money to which every other Australian is entitled. I will not be the health minister who cuts off their noses to spite their faces. We will work with the private doctor from Cunderdin, Dr Gray. He is an excellent provider of private services in that area. We do not want to do away with private services in the bush; we want to support them, together with providing a good public health system. I am happy for the Department of Health to work in whatever way it can to make sure that a workable system is provided in Merredin. However, at the end of the day, I am not going to cut off the 70 per cent of income that Merredin gets from the federal Government. If the people of Merredin want a national health service, they should go to the federal Government and ask for one.