BUSSELTON DISTRICT HOSPITAL, NURSING SHORTAGE

868.   Hon BARRY HOUSE to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Health:

Does the minister acknowledge that -

(1)   There is a serious nursing staff shortage at the Busselton District Hospital - currently down 10 full-time equivalent positions - and, as a consequence, the hospital has had to refuse patient admissions, staff morale is very low, and the resultant increased pressure on current nursing staff has led to resignations and an increase in sick leave and mistakes, particularly concerning drug administration; and

(2)   Four patients requiring surgery were sent from Bunbury to Perth with the Royal Flying Doctor Service in one day despite a surgeon being prepared to operate locally but who was unable to do so because there was a lack of nursing staff for post-operative care?

(3)   What is being done to address the problems?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

(1)-(3)   To date, the Busselton District Hospital is three full-time equivalents down on its roster. The South West Area Health Service is currently in the process of actively recruiting nursing staff to Busselton hospital. During certain rosters in July, when the hospital was operating at full capacity and a high number of nursing staff were on sick leave, Busselton hospital did not admit non-emergency patients. Busselton District Hospital has been accessible to emergency patients at all times. For personal reasons, four staff recently resigned. To allege that this was as a result of reduced nursing levels is mere speculation and has no basis in fact. As is the case in a number of industries, sick leave increases during the winter months, especially as a result of influenza. Finally, Australian incident monitoring system reporting indicates that errors associated with drug administration have decreased by more than 50 per cent at Busselton District Hospital during 2002, 2003 and 2004.