

HOSPITALS, FREE NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

1435. Hon. P.G. Pental to the Minister for Health

I refer to the Government's free needle exchange for drug users at Government hospitals and ask -

- (a) is it correct that the label on the Fitpack Plus box states that 'to reduce the risk of transmitting hepatitis C, hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS and bacterial infections when injecting...' certain steps are recommended; and
- (b) what is the current risk of transmitting these diseases and how is it measured?

Mr KUCERA replied:

It is assumed that the policy that is referred to is the Department of Health Operational Circular OP 1522/01 (Provision of sterile needles and syringes from rural and regional hospitals to people who inject drugs, 20 December 2001). This Operational Circular requires that all regional and rural hospitals that provide emergency after-hours services to provide after-hours access to needles and syringes for people who inject drugs. This service is not an 'exchange' service requiring the return of used injecting equipment but rather an 'availability' service.

- (a) Yes
- (b) The intent of the question is unclear and cannot be answered without more specific identification of the context. For example, risk from injecting versus sexual risk; normal population versus prison population; community versus health care settings.