

ALBANY HOSPITAL — PATIENT RECORDS

400. Mr P.B. WATSON to the Minister for Health:

I refer to medical records of at least 12 mental health inpatients at Albany Hospital, including patient names, reasons for admission and suicide risk assessment factors, being found in the outside courtyard in the grounds of the hospital by a visitor on 8 June.

- (1) Was the minister advised of this serious breach of patient confidentiality?
- (2) Have any of the patients or the next of kin been advised of the breach of their privacy?
- (3) How did this significant breach of patient privacy occur?
- (4) Given these records were updated on 29 May and found in a public area outside the hospital, does the minister concede that these records may have in fact been seen and read by unauthorised people?

Mr J.H.D. DAY replied:

- (1)–(4) Patient confidentiality is of course a critical aspect of our health system, and it is essential that patients and their families and staff can have complete confidence in the integrity of our health system and its ensuring that patient records are kept confidential. That is almost always the case. Unfortunately, very occasionally it seems mistakes can occur and I understand it is the case that some confidential patient information relating to a handover from one shift to another at Albany Hospital was left in the courtyard of the hospital. I was not aware of this issue until today, following a media inquiry initially, but I would be interested to know when the member for Albany was provided with the information.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: That is very interesting.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Today is the first day that this matter has come to light and into the public arena, but I understand that the information was given to the member for Albany by an individual, presumably the person who found it or somebody in contact with that person, on 8 June. Does that sound right? So about two weeks ago the member for Albany —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: This is not a debate. Through the Chair. A quick answer, please.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany, thank you. Through the Chair.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: My understanding —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cannington, I call you to order for the first time, member for Wanneroo, for the second time. Member for Albany, let the minister answer through the Chair.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: This information was found at the hospital approximately two weeks ago, at least. In fact I think, from what I am advised, that it was found on about 29 May and provided to the member for Albany on 8 June, so he has been holding onto this information for the last two weeks, and he waited until Parliament resumed today to engage in a media stunt rather than deal with the issue in a sincere and proper manner. If this member was genuinely intentioned —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands, I call you to order for the first time. Member for Willagee, I call you to order for the first time. A quick answer through the Chair, please.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany, I call you to order for the first time. Through the Chair!

Mr J.H.D. DAY: The member for Albany should answer the question. He should tell us all he knows. When was he given it? Is it correct he was given it on 8 June? When was he given it?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: This is not a cross-questioning exercise. Through the Chair.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany!

Mr J.H.D. DAY: If the member was not given it on 8 June, I would like him to clarify when he was given it, and why he did not immediately hand it over to the WA Country Health Service.

Point of Order

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Mr Speaker, as you well know, question time is the time for the opposition to be able to ask questions, not for the government to ask questions and expect an answer.

Several members interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am waiting to be able to complete my point of order, Mr Speaker. The minister was asked when he was advised of this serious breach of patient confidentiality; he has not answered that question. Surely that is what the minister should be doing.

The SPEAKER: I agree with you on part of your point of order. This is not a cross-question from the opposition to the government and back again. I want a quick, succinct answer through the Chair.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr P.C. Tinley interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Willagee, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: As I said earlier, I was first made aware of this issue—as was the Minister for Mental Health, who has an equally strong interest in the matter —

Mr P. Papalia: When?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Today, I said—if the member was listening—this morning.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr J.H.D. DAY: We have asked for a full investigation and, indeed, a report will be provided to us as soon as that is completed. It is a very serious issue; there is no question about that. It would appear to have been as a result of human error. Somebody has made a mistake; people make mistakes. We have humans working in our health system in Western Australia—nearly 40 000 of them—and, occasionally, people make mistakes. This is not an issue in any way caused by the government or by the senior administration of the health system in Western Australia. I will wait to see what the report provides, but it appears to be a case of somebody making a mistake, and one thing we do not want is for undue pressure to be put on that individual as a result of the publicity that has been drawn to this matter by the member for Albany, the Leader of the Opposition and other members of the opposition.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call you to order for the second time, member for Albany. Are you finished, minister?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I am almost finished, Mr Speaker.

In conclusion, I think the member for Albany, given that he has asked the question, has a responsibility to tell us how long he has had this information and why he did not immediately make it known to the WA Country Health Service when he was given it.