

ROCKINGHAM GENERAL HOSPITAL — ONCOLOGY WARD

350. Mr P. ABETZ to the Minister for Health:

My question is in connection with the issue of the oncology ward at Rockingham General Hospital, which is not yet open, being fully equipped to begin treating cancer patients. I seem to recall that the health spokesperson from the opposition asked a question about this yesterday, and today he has issued a media statement reiterating his claims, even though I had understood that the minister had answered those questions. Can the minister please inform the house of the reasons that the new oncology ward at Rockingham hospital is not being opened this month as originally planned? In particular it would be of interest to me and the house, I am sure, whether this failing had its origin under the management of the previous government.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

Funny that! I said to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition yesterday that I had taken it pretty easy on him and told him why I had taken it easy on him. I told him the reasons—some of them off the record—why I had taken it pretty easy on him in my answer yesterday. He came into this Parliament, as he does, making accusations about things going wrong, yet we so often have to take them with a grain of salt.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGowan: Acquisitions?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Did I say “accusations” wrongly?

At the end of question time yesterday, I provided additional information that explained why that oncology ward was not open.

Mr M. McGowan: The one you promised would be open by now!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Dr K.D. HAMES: It would surprise me enormously to find that the member for Rockingham and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition were out in the community spruiking the fact that we had failed in our duties as a government to open it. As I pointed out yesterday, the oncology ward and other parts of the newly constructed Rockingham hospital have not been handed over yet to the health department. We do not have them. We cannot go out there and staff them with doctors and nurses because we do not have them yet. Who has them? Building Management and Works has them.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Dr K.D. HAMES: Why does BMW still have control over them this late? Let me tell you, Mr Speaker, that when the contracts were awarded, there were three phases to the construction of Rockingham hospital. Phase 1 contract was awarded to a company called Esslemont on 27 April 2007; the second contract was awarded to Cooper and Oxley on 9 August 2007; and the third contract was awarded to Esslemont again on 4 August 2008. All three contracts were awarded during the time of the former government.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: So we have to say, “That’s a fair while ago. Why are they not built yet? Why has this rotten government not opened the wards?” It is because they were not built properly. The company that was awarded the contracts by the government did not build the buildings properly.

Mr F.M. Logan: But you guys are managing it.

Dr K.D. HAMES: No, these are things that still happened in the time of the former government.

Mr F.M. Logan: But in the last two years you have been in charge of managing it.

Dr K.D. HAMES: When we went to get the fire design accreditation to make sure the buildings had been built properly, the buildings failed to pass that accreditation. There were incomplete firewalls, incorrect materials used for fire protection and compromised fire safety solutions. The contractor was therefore told to go back and fix those again. When the buildings were inspected for a second time, they failed again. We had to send another company in there to fix the fire and safety walls. With the last lot of stuff, we still have not got access to the new theatre because the theatre floor was built as a slope. It was not even flat; it was a slope! Now the company has to find a way of either fixing the slope or pulling out the floor.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Trolley going downhill!

Dr K.D. HAMES: Yes, it would be good to be operating on a patient while chasing the trolley across the theatre!

These things were, therefore, built under the former government's watch.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members! I ask the minister to take his seat. I think the member for Balcatta made an excellent point earlier today in question time about the amount of time it is taking to answer questions. I direct that comment to the minister. I also direct it to some members of the opposition who continue to interject. If they want the process to be more efficient, there needs to be cooperation from both sides.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The vast majority of opposition members come from a union background in one form or another. It surprises me enormously that members opposite want me to put our health staff in a building that is not certified safe.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will not put my staff in a building that has not been certified safe, and we will make sure that it is safe before we put people in there. We desperately want oncology services in the Rockingham region. There is a huge demand for them. People are having enormous difficulty trying to get to the hospital in Fremantle; that is why we have always strongly supported that oncology unit being put in Rockingham hospital. This facility will be a great boon to the local residents, but we will not do it at the expense of risk to our own staff. We have employed staff ready to go in there. We are waiting. I am very hopeful that over the following month we will get that certification that will allow us to then quickly move those staff in there and get that oncology ward up and running to look after those patients in that region who have cancer. This will be done in the way that we have gone to enormous lengths to look after cancer patients in the rest of the state with funding through our patient assisted travel scheme.