

MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING MACHINE, PRINCESS MARGARET HOSPITAL FOR CHILDREN

Statement by Minister for Health

MR KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Health) [9.06 am]: Today I announce a major commitment by the State Government to the health of Western Australian children. As members will be aware, for some months the Government has been fighting to secure a Medicare licence to offset the operating costs of a magnetic resonance imaging machine at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children.

Mr Board interjected.

Mr KUCERA: I will get to the member for Murdoch later.

This was not an unreasonable request; however, it was again ignored in this week's federal budget. We can clearly see the attitude of the Howard-Costello Government; it can provide for scanners at airports to deal with the fear of the unknown, but it will not provide one scanner in our only children's hospital to deal with the reality of cancer. In most other Australian States, children's hospitals have access to Medicare-funded MRI facilities. Since 1998, four Medicare licences have been issued to private profit-making MRI operators in Western Australia. However, the Western Australian public health system has not been granted a licence for almost a decade, and the special needs of our children are being ignored. Despite the massive failure of the Commonwealth's MRI policy to deliver a fair or equitable distribution of Medicare-funded MRIs to Western Australia - this became known as the scan scam - the former coalition Government was deafening in its silence, except when it interfered in a ham-fisted attempt to undermine the State Government's recent efforts to assist Western Australian children.

Last week, I became aware of compelling new evidence of the need for infants and young children to have access to MRI technology. I immediately sent this information to the federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Senator Kay Patterson. Clinicians from PMH drew to my attention last month's *Journal of Paediatric Radiology* - Volume 32, No 4, April 2002. The research shows that repeat exposure to computerised tomography significantly increases the relative risk of infants and young children developing cancer at some stage of their lives. This reinforces the urgent need to replace the CT technology in PMH with an MRI machine. The doctors at PMH are to be commended for bringing this material to my attention and for supporting the Government in its efforts over the past few months.

Despite repeated representations and correspondence to the federal minister and the presentation of this new evidence, there has been a scandalous disregard for the needs of Western Australian children. Indeed, I believe the new evidence will reverberate right across the nation. We cannot allow this to continue. Accordingly, I have requested the Director General of the Department of Health to prepare tender documents for the immediate purchase of a machine for PMH. In addition, I have asked for the tender to include replacement machines for Royal Perth Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, and to make future provision for Fremantle Hospital should the federal Government recognise the urgent needs of almost half the metropolitan area and the south of the State. This decision will put pressure on the health budget -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Moore to order for the first time. I remind members that interjections are not allowed during brief ministerial statements. For the duration of my time as Speaker, a member who interjects during a brief ministerial statement will be called to order.

Mr KUCERA: In the meantime, I have also had discussions with the TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, which has indicated possible support for other solutions. I will pursue what appears to be a magnificent gesture on its behalf for the children of Western Australia.

I also take this opportunity to thank the thousands of Western Australians who signed petitions imploring the federal Government to meet its responsibilities. It appears we are being ignored. The issue of fair access to magnetic resonance imaging technology demonstrates why the State Government must be ever vigilant in its relations with the Commonwealth. Unlike our ineffective State Opposition, we will continue to take the battle to their mates in Canberra on behalf of the Western Australian community. For over nine years they have let our kids down. The Gallop Government will deliver a fair go to all Western Australian children.

I now table the documents.

[See papers Nos 1465 and 1466.]