

HOSPITAL NURSES SUPPORT FUND

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

I note that earlier this week the minister talked about a Liberal-National government initiative to establish the \$28 million hospital nurses support fund. The Armadale-Kelmscott Memorial Hospital is much used by my constituents and also draws many staff from my electorate. They do a fantastic job for the south eastern region of Perth and I am keen to be able to inform them of more details —

The SPEAKER: Members to my left may not be impressed with the question; I too am becoming less impressed with the question. I do not want a long preamble and would prefer a rather more direct question. The member for Southern River will get to the point of his question.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members to my left!

Mr J.N. Hyde: Man overboard; throw him a lifeline!

The SPEAKER: I formally call the member for Perth for the first time. We do not have a long question time today and I would prefer to get through a few more questions.

Mr P. ABETZ: I am keen for members to be informed in more detail about this fund. Can the minister please outline what nurses will be able to use this fund for and the benefits that will flow to nurses in addition to the fulfilment of this excellent election commitment?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

I thank the member for finally getting his question out, and an excellent question it was! Well done to the member for Southern River.

His excellent question is about the hospital nurses support fund that the Liberal Party committed to in opposition. It is one of the many election commitments that we have fulfilled. I am pleased to say that we have now fulfilled our election commitment to provide a \$28 million fund over four years to support all the nurses who work in public hospitals in this state.

The purpose of the hospital nurses support fund is two-fold. First, there was funding in the previous government's budget for childcare centres, and that commitment will still be fulfilled with a \$6.7 million component of the fund allocated to those childcare centres. The remainder of the fund—more than \$20 million—will be available on a per head basis—a full-time-equivalent basis—for the nurses to decide what they want in their hospitals to make their working conditions easier to bear. We know how hard our nurses have been working. We know how much stress and pressure they have been under because of the huge workload placed on them, partly as a result of the difficulty of recruiting nursing and partly because of the huge increase in demand for their services that they have had to deal with.

This government put it to nurses to come up with the things they want to fund. It has been an interesting process. I have to say that some of the ideas that they have come to us with are things that the government should fund and, in fact, will fund. Some of those things include, for example, staff accommodation, which we need to manage in a much better way for our nursing staff, and better security. For example, Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital is one hospital where significantly improved security will be provided for nurses. Some of the other suggestions have been interesting and should be funded by government. However, we all know how it is—government should fund a whole pile of things and it is always hard to get the money and there are orders of priorities. This program will go to each and every hospital for each and every nurse to participate in decisions about what they want, including things like furnishings in staff accommodation and better relaxation areas in nursing wards for the many staff who work long hours and have nowhere to sit and have a cup of tea. It is about improving quality and the standards of the conditions in which nurses work. Some nurses are after funding for better security, some for more parking and better security for parking; and some for childcare centre support. We do not mind what nurses decide. We want to make nurses' working conditions better so that they are happy to come to work and to stay at work, working for the government. The feedback we are getting is that nurses are extremely happy with this additional level of support. The Liberal-National government will give nurses \$20 million over four years and they will decide what they want. I think this is a great initiative—one of a number put forward by the Liberal Party when in opposition. It is yet another election commitment that has been fulfilled by this government.