

POST MORTEMs

113. Mr ANDREWS to the Minister for Health:

Will the minister inform the House what progress is being made to identify issues of concern relating to the way post mortems are conducted in this State?

Mr KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for his question. I also appreciate the position taken by members opposite on this issue. It is not a political issue; it is a fairly emotive one, which is affecting many families in our city at present.

For the past three months, investigators from the Health Department and the Crown Solicitors Office have been conducting an investigation into post mortem practices in Western Australia because of a number of issues that have arisen in the United Kingdom and New South Wales. The Government responded immediately to these concerns and the Health Department opened a hotline. It has received 34 calls from people understandably concerned about post mortems conducted on their loved ones. The report shows that changes made to the Coroner's Act by the previous Government in 1996 are working well. However, there is no legal requirement under the Human Tissue and Transplant Act to consult the next of kin about retention of organs. We will work to ensure that organs and tissues are obtained only with the full and informed consent of families. I stress that it will be informed consent. I do not want to pre-empt the findings of the final report due on 31 July. However, it is likely that changes to hospital post mortem requirements will remove this discrepancy and ensure that the public can have total confidence in Western Australia's post mortem practices. This will help people who have been caused extreme distress due to the need to revisit the deaths of their loved ones.

There is no evidence to show that any of the bizarre practices seen in a recent television program have been occurring in this State. This should not in any way be an exercise in blaming. It is about ensuring the future dignity of people who must go through the trauma of losing a loved one unexpectedly. I table the report on that.

[See paper No 315.]