

SWAN DISTRICT HOSPITAL, TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

262. Mr BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I note the ministerial statement earlier and refer the minister to the closure of the emergency department at Swan District Hospital. When did the minister first learn about concerns relating to a lack of senior positions at the hospital?

Mr KUCERA replied:

The necessity to instigate a full review of all emergency services was brought to my attention in March this year when concerns were raised mainly about paediatrics at Swan District Hospital. I must clarify a few issues about Swan District Hospital because there have been a lot of histrionics in the past couple of days.

A review of emergency services was conducted in this State in 1996, as a result of which very little was done until a tragedy occurred last year at Joondalup and of which members of this House would be very well aware. Dr Gary Geelhoed was asked to look at what had been done since 1996. The advice I have been given is that very little had been done to improve issues, particularly at Swan District Hospital. As a result of Dr Gary Geelhoed's review, I met with the members of the emergency departments in this State about a month ago, when some of these issues were outlined. However, Swan District Hospital was not mentioned as having a problem until last week when one of the consultants there decided to reduce her working hours for personal reasons. These issues certainly do not fall on her decision. However, the emergency doctors at Swan District Hospital then insisted that the level of emergency triage being carried out at Swan District Hospital needed to be downgraded because the doctors simply could not cope with the level of emergencies coming in the door.

I have seen the member for Murdoch going around the hospitals, and I congratulate him for that. However, he and his previous colleague in the role of Minister for Health would know issues exist with emergency management generally across the State. The reality is that Swan District Hospital was downgraded at the insistence, quite rightly, of the emergency doctors. This issue is not a matter of funding; it is a matter, as I said in my ministerial statement, of availability of senior consultants and registrars to work at the hospital. I am heartened by the response I received from the corporate sector - private hospitals - to give us help. I am also heartened to a degree by people in South Africa who have written to us, including someone who contacted the department as late as yesterday, wanting to assist us in getting doctors on the ground. The reality is that Midland, as the members in that area would know, has a shortfall of 31 general practitioners. It has been declared an area of special need. I invite the member for Murdoch to work with me on a bipartisan approach to this issue because at the end of the day -

Mr Barnett interjected.

Mr KUCERA: The member for Murdoch's leader should note that the member for Murdoch and I have had discussions on the issue of the availability of senior medical staff; he is prepared to do that and I am pleased to see it. However, the Government guarantees that Swan District Hospital will eventually get back to the level at which it should be and the level indicated in 1996 at which it should have been.