

POSITRON EMISSION TOMOGRAPHY FACILITY

Statement by Minister for Health

MR KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Health) [2.17 pm]: I wish to clarify the State Government's position on the establishment of a positron emission tomography facility in Western Australia.

PET services are used to assist in the diagnosis of a range of conditions, particularly cancer. To operate a PET facility requires a cyclotron, which is used to manufacture radioactive isotopes. The isotopes are injected into patients, and a PET camera is used to produce a radiological image. The Western Australian Government is anxious that Western Australians should have access to PET services and is prepared to contribute funding towards the cost of establishing and operating a PET facility in this State.

PET technology is particularly expensive. The Department of Health has estimated that the overall cost of establishing a PET facility in this State would be in the order of \$7.5 million to \$8 million. Once established, the operating cost of the service will exceed \$1 million a year. The State would obviously prefer to share the cost of establishing and providing these services with the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth has offered to contribute funding for PET facilities through a national tender process. In the Commonwealth Government's tender, the Commonwealth has offered to provide assistance to a maximum of \$3.85 million towards the capital cost of establishing a PET facility and to provide a licence enabling the facility to make claims against the Medicare benefits schedule for the services it provides.

I am concerned that the Commonwealth's funding offer has not considered Western Australia's unique situation. In addition, the Commonwealth's proposed arrangements present financial risks for the State. I have written to the commonwealth Minister for Health, Dr Wooldridge, seeking further consideration of the Commonwealth's funding offer and assurances regarding the financial risks. In regard to the issue of the quantum of commonwealth funding, Western Australia is in the unique situation of having to purchase both a cyclotron and a PET camera. For other States, it is possible to use isotopes that have been manufactured in an existing cyclotron in their own State or imported from a neighbouring State. For example, isotopes are now being airfreighted from a cyclotron in Melbourne for use in providing PET services in Adelaide. However, due to the short half-life of the isotopes and the long distance from other capital cities to Perth, it is not feasible for Western Australia to use isotopes produced by a cyclotron located in another State. For Western Australians to have access to PET services, a cyclotron should be located here.

My letter to Dr Wooldridge asks that he give further consideration to the extra costs to Western Australia that will arise for this State because of the necessity for us to purchase a cyclotron. In addition, I asked Dr Wooldridge for an assurance about a proposed condition on the commonwealth funding and licence requiring that the PET facility must be up and running by August next year. Advice given to me indicates that it is most unlikely we will be able to secure the necessary equipment and prepare the site within that time frame.

The assurance I have sought from Dr Wooldridge is that the Commonwealth will be willing to accept that the State will have satisfied its obligation if it makes its best efforts to establish the facility by August 2002. I am also wary about some clauses in the Commonwealth's tender documents that suggest the Commonwealth may be prepared to contribute to the operating costs for the positron emission tomography services only in the short term. If the Commonwealth withdrew its support for PET services, that could leave the State with a bill of over \$1 million a year. To address this concern I have sought clarification from Dr Wooldridge about the Commonwealth's intention to provide ongoing support for the PET services. Since writing my letter I have spoken with Dr Wooldridge, and officers from the Department of Health have had discussions with their counterparts in the commonwealth department.

I believe that the Commonwealth understands the issues we have raised, and I am optimistic that it will be prepared to move on those issues. I am confident that by approaching the Commonwealth's offer in a sensible way, this Government is laying the groundwork for a facility that will be a sustainable asset for Western Australia.