

SIR CHARLES GAIRDNER HOSPITAL — MENTAL HEALTH FACILITY

**844. Mr I.M. BRITZA to the Minister for Health:**

I recently read about the challenges faced by state hospital emergency departments especially in catering for people who present with symptoms of acute mental illness. Could the minister outline to the house what strategies have been implemented and are under development to help this vulnerable group of Western Australians?

**Dr K.D. HAMES replied:**

I thank the member for the question. This has been an issue for us in our hospitals, particularly at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital where significant numbers of patients who have a mental illness present. When significant numbers of those patients are in the ward requiring admission, there is often not a suitable place for them to go. The wards at the hospital can be full, and to get them to facilities such as Graylands Hospital, where they may have been committed, or to a home program, takes a long time. When those patients are waiting at the emergency department, they need an awful lot of care. We have found that in recent months there has been significant detriment to the four-hour rule program because of large numbers of patients with mental illness having to stay in that emergency department and using beds that would otherwise be used to control the flow of patients needing to come into the hospital for other medical problems. We looked at what we could do and I am pleased to say that we were able to find space immediately adjacent to the emergency department where we have created a mental health observation area that has six beds and two chairs for those mental health patients, some of whom wait up to 72 hours for transport. That is a far better place for them to be. When they are in the emergency department, there are patients, doctors and nurses coming and going, and often those mental health patients need full-time observation, so there has to be a staff member, particularly security staff, sitting there looking after them to make sure they do not get into trouble.

I would like to pass on my deep gratitude to Hawaiian Investments, which, through its Healing Tree foundation, donated a significant amount of money to assist in the construction of this area. The area was done with funding from the hospital, with half of that money from Hawaiian Investments. I am very grateful for the contribution that was made. It will make a big difference. We now have room for eight mental health patients who otherwise would have been sitting waiting in the emergency department. Now there is this offset ward where they can get specialist attention and care while waiting to go either to a ward or to Graylands, or to be transferred back into the community, having received treatment.