

SIR CHARLES GAIRDNER HOSPITAL, RADIATION THERAPY

488. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer the minister to the 400 patients, primarily cancer patients, who have been awaiting radiation therapy at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital for over five months.

- (1) Is the minister aware that he does not need to apply for a licence to replace antiquated equipment at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital?
- (2) As the minister knows that he will not receive a licence for new equipment unless he makes an application to the federal Government, why has he not applied?
- (3) Will the minister today commit to apply for a licence for additional radiation therapy machines?
- (4) Why is the minister continuing to mislead the people of Western Australia over his efforts to secure this equipment when no budgetary allocation has been made for replacement or additional equipment?

Points of Order

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The last part of the question clearly contravenes Standing Order No 77, which relates to allegations or imputations that a minister has been misleading. The question is out of order.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That point of order is normally reserved for instances in which allegations have been made about a member misleading other members in this House. The member for Murdoch has asked why the Minister for Health is misleading the public of Western Australia in comments he makes outside this place. I suggest that there is no breach of standing orders.

The SPEAKER: I thank members for their contributions. I think that that part of the question contravenes the rules and does not add or take away from the substance of the question asked. I ask the member to withdraw that particular part of his question.

Mr M.F. BOARD: I will rephrase part (4).

The SPEAKER: Perhaps you should withdraw it.

Mr M.F. BOARD: Why does the minister continue to give the people of Western Australia incorrect information about his efforts to replace radiation equipment at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital?

The SPEAKER: I need you to withdraw that part of the question.

Mr M.F. BOARD: I withdraw the term "mislead".

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(4) There is a move to replace the existing cancer machines at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital under the existing licensing process. I point out to the member for Murdoch that on 3 June last year I wrote to Senator Kay Patterson. I am happy to table this correspondence. This is one of those occasions on which the Commonwealth and the State have been working very well together. Dr Mark Platell heads up our representation. He is a very senior person on the committee that is looking at oncology radiation programs across the State. I wrote to Senator Patterson last June shortly after her appointment. That letter states -

Your budget initiative 'Better treatment for cancer patients - radiation oncology services' is a welcome and positive step forward. Radiation oncology is often a neglected area of health care,

...

I would like to draw your attention to the provision of radiation oncology services in Western Australia and propose that the State as a whole should be considered an area of need in radiation oncology.

A report was completed at the end of 2000, before we came into power. The previous health minister would be well aware of it. The Baume report pointed out very clearly that the federal Government needed to assist the States with the provision of radiation machines across Australia. I am happy to say that it has done that.

The second issue relates to radiation therapists. There is a desperate worldwide shortage of radiation therapists and the Australian Health Ministers Council has recognised that special consideration must be given to their training. As a result of that approach, it was recommended that the new radiation machines be placed in regional centres in not only Western Australia but also across Australia. It was pointed out to Senator Patterson and the committee by me and Dr Platell that this was not appropriate for Western Australia, and that we were required to ensure that any new machines and licences be placed in the city. A letter written in October 2002 stated that it had been acknowledged that any new machinery should go to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, that negotiations were still taking place and that the issue would be finalised at the next meeting.

We cannot go through the formalities of officially applying for a licence - I am told it takes about a day - until that issue has been finalised. There is no point applying for a licence for a machine when we do not know where on earth it will go.

Several opposition members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I was asked a question that I feel quite comfortable answering.

In her reply Senator Patterson stated quite clearly that she valued -

... Western Australia's commitment to making radiotherapy more available to patients, including those living outside the metropolitan areas, and I appreciate the particular difficulties your State experiences due to its geographical size and dispersed rural population.

The letter continues -

Therefore, it is my intention to work closely with the States and Territories to identify further priority areas of need for radiotherapy facilities in regional Australia ...

The next part of the letter, which was written in October 2002, is very important. It states -

In support of this commitment, my Department will shortly be writing to all the States and Territories asking them to collaborate to identify priority areas of need for radiotherapy services to be services to be funded by the Budget measure, with a view to providing final recommendations for my consideration by December 2002.

We have been waiting since December 2002 for her recommendation. Once that is done, we are more than happy to work with the Commonwealth to supply the additional machinery. I am more than happy to guarantee that when the licence is provided - it has been indicated to me that cooperation from the Commonwealth is imminent - we will then move ahead and make sure that the provisions are in place.

I am happy to table the documents to which I referred, because they clearly demonstrate that one person only in this House misleads the people of this State when he talks about health issues, and he sits on the other side of the House.

[See papers Nos 869 and 870.]

Point of Order

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Mr Speaker, you just ruled that the question my colleague asked the Minister for Health was out of order, because it referred to a quote that suggested that the Minister for Health had misled the public of Western Australia. The Minister for Health has just suggested that my colleague is misleading this House.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Which colleague?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I have many colleagues.

The Minister for Health is being cushioned and protected by some of his colleagues. I ask you, Mr Speaker, to protect members on this side of the House.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: There is no point of order, and this is an abuse of a point of order. I refer the member for Hillarys to Standing Order No 77, which states that -

(1) Questions should not contain -

It does not refer to answers.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Further to the point of order, the two circumstances we have seen in this House are absolutely identical. It is your job, Mr Speaker, to interpret the standing orders, and all we ask is that you do so consistently.

Mr Mike Board; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Rob Johnson; Speaker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Colin Barnett

The SPEAKER: I appreciate the closeness of the two rulings. However, Standing Order No 77 states that questions must not be deliberately misleading. The Minister for Health's statement was not deliberately misleading, and, as such, there is no point of order.

Questions without Notice Resumed