

HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

**797. Mr P.W. ANDREWS to the Minister for Health:**

Will the minister explain what is being done to ease pressure on metropolitan hospital emergency departments this winter?

**Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:**

Thank you, Mr Speaker -

Mr C.J. Barnett: Sack the minister; that's the answer.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: For a moment I thought the forest alliance had come into the Chamber; I thought I heard a numbat!

Last Saturday I was pleased to announce a new campaign, which may be important to some groups of people in the public gallery today, although none of them has yet reached the target age. The new campaign is designed to ease pressure on hospitals this winter. One feature of the campaign is the prepare for winter program that will target people aged 65 and over.

I compliment General Practice Divisions of Western Australia Ltd at Osborne Park. It is a classic example of doctors who have acknowledged the pressure that has been placed on emergency departments because of the number of people with respiratory diseases who have regularly fronted up at them during winter. These people are usually far sicker than they would otherwise be because they have postponed a visit to their general practitioner due to access issues. The people we are targeting with this program are those most likely to present at hospital emergency departments with acute respiratory problems.

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I am afraid I can hear that numbat again, Mr Speaker.

Mr R.F. Johnson: We can see the numbat.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The wombat has started as well. I thought wombats had short - it does not matter.

This is a very serious issue for people aged 65 and over in this community. They are the people who have the kinds of conditions that are triggered by colder weather, such as acute respiratory problems, heart problems, diabetes and other chronic conditions. This intensive campaign is planned for the next seven weeks as we head into the winter period to educate people about simple matters, such as making sure they take their medication properly.

Members who have elderly parents may choose to listen to what I am saying and the member for Nedlands may choose to listen too. Often families do not realise that their parents are too proud to ask for support to visit their local doctor. It is important that this campaign will target those people. Ultimately they are the sorts of people who require the services of emergency departments during winter and who can most easily be kept out of emergency departments by proper attention to medication and by a visit to their local family doctor.

Last year approximately 150 Western Australians were lost to the flu. Unfortunately, most of those people died from complications that in many instances could have been avoided. Most were living treasures in the sense that they were the oldest and most vulnerable people in the community.

This year for the first time the program will aim, for instance, at Fremantle Hospital to identify more than 800 former patients who fall into the risk category. We will ensure unashamedly that those patients are targeted through this program. Those patients and their GPs have been sent letters detailing the benefits, for instance, of flu and pneumococcal vaccination. I thank the member for Mandurah for pushing this issue onto retirement groups in his electorate.

Mr M.F. Board interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The member mentioned Mr Burns. Fremantle Hospital is doing excellent work. For the first time in a long while hospitals will be back in touch with their communities and will push these issues, rather than simply rely on things in the community happening automatically. Finally, another measure to deal with winter demands on emergency departments is the addition of 120 hospital beds in non-teaching hospitals, which will provide a boost to doctors in those hospitals. Mr Speaker, this Government wants to ensure that the most vulnerable people in the community are supported.

The SPEAKER: I call to order for the third time the member for Nedlands; for the second time the member for Kalgoorlie; and for the first time the member for Hillarys.