

CORONAVIRUS — REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICE PREPAREDNESS

**214. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to commentary from doctors and health workers in Bunbury, Geraldton and Albany about the preparedness of regional WA health services to respond to COVID-19.

- (1) Can the minister please provide an update on the status of regional health service preparedness, including intensive care unit capability in our regional hospitals?
- (2) How is the state government assisting health service providers and general practitioners to access critical supplies, including personal protective equipment?
- (3) When will he make a decision to open COVID-19 clinics in Albany, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Karratha, South Hedland and Broome, as previously announced?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)–(3) They are all important points that should be addressed and I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss this. Obviously, preparedness is one of the key activities that our department is involved in at the moment. This is the reason why our current strategy around suppressing the onset of the disease—flattening the curve for want of a better description—is one of the more important things that we can do to make sure that we have extra days around preparedness. This morning I met with the chief executive of the WA Country Health Service to receive a further update on country preparedness. It is true to say that all our country service outlets—our big regional hospitals and clinics—are well prepared for the onset of the epidemic.

Our big Achilles heel in any country setting is the workforce, not the buildings. We do not have the same big pool of workforce to draw upon as we have in other settings. For instance, just today we are flying a number of staff to Broome to help back up the emergency department in Broome hospital because a number of emergency workers have had to self-isolate. That is a good example of how we have had to scramble to make sure that we best support our regional workforce settings.

We have a good supply of ventilators coming through and they will be made available in our regional hospitals. One of the bigger pieces of work we are doing is with the Royal Flying Doctor Service to make sure that if any of our patients tip into an acute stage of the virus, they can be evacuated to our big metropolitan hospitals, which have the high-end acuity settings, such as ICUs and things of that nature, that go beyond a lot of the ICUs and high-dependency units in our country hospitals. It is a piece of work that is ongoing, but it is one that is well advanced.

In relation to PPE, I have just come from an announcement with the co-chair of the Minderoo Foundation, Mr Andrew Forrest, and Madam Dong, the Consul General of the People's Republic of China, who have been assisting us and the federal government to secure good supply chains of PPE. In coming days, we will see a significant supply come into Western Australia. All our healthcare workers, regardless of the setting, whether it is in our big metropolitan hospitals, our general hospitals or our regional settings, will be in a position to have all the PPE they need to protect themselves and their patients. The supply of that PPE is about to be resolved as much through the work that we are doing with the Minderoo Foundation as through the work that the federal government is doing. A significant supply is coming through and we are very confident of that.

In relation to the COVID-19 clinics, again, the federal government has intervened in that space and it is producing what it euphemistically calls pop-up clinics. They will be called respiratory clinics, but essentially they will be the same as our testing clinics. We have established one in Albany and they will be rolled out in Geraldton and other regional settings in coming weeks. Member for Dawesville and member for Mandurah, there will also be one in Halls Head, so that is obviously a pleasing development for those communities. I am still waiting for full details from the WA Primary Health Alliance on the settings for those clinics and when they are going to be stood up. Obviously, that is a very pleasing development. For members' information, the pop-up clinics will draw upon general practice staff rather than WA Country Health Service staff, so that will obviously be a pleasing addition to our overall workforce.