

HOSPITALS, ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS

303. Mrs PARKER to the Minister for Health:

How do elective surgery waiting lists and times in Western Australia compare with those in other States?

Mr DAY replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question. This is an important issue and one of the real issues for Western Australians who need to use the health system. Channel Nine's *A Current Affair* last night ran an interesting story about waiting lists for elective surgery around Australia. The report took a national approach to the issue. I was particularly interested in the introduction to the segment, in which the reporter said -

In all but one state around Australia, public hospital waiting lists have hit an all-time high, and patients are feeling the pinch.

I wonder which State that might be. Would the Opposition like to tell me?

Several members interjected.

Mr DAY: The one State in which elective surgery waiting lists are not at an all-time high is Western Australia. The reason for that is the policies of this Government; in particular, its allocation of \$125m over five years specifically for elective surgery performed in public hospitals and the establishment of the Central Wait List Bureau, which has been extremely effective in making sure our public hospitals are used more effectively so that patients do not need to wait as long as they otherwise might have. I give credit to my predecessor, the member for Albany, for establishing the Central Wait List Bureau. It has resulted in a reduction in the number of people on the waiting list for surgery at the teaching hospitals from a maximum of 17 000 to the current level of 10 155. It has also resulted in a general downtrend in the median waiting time from a maximum of 8.5 months to 5.45 months. The report included interviews with a number of patients who had been waiting for around 18 months for orthopaedic surgery; that is, joint replacements. Those patients were from the great Labor States of Victoria and New South Wales. Western Australia is showing the way in reducing waiting times for elective surgery. The average waiting time for elective orthopaedic surgery in this State is 7.09 months, compared with the Labor examples of Victoria, which has a waiting time of 10.75 months, New South Wales with 10.3 months and Tasmania with 16.67 months.

Also in the program, the national head of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Kerryn Phelps, commented that -

I think what we really need to do is focus on properly funding the front end - the doctors, the nurses, the health-care workers - the resources that are going into patient care.

I could not agree more. I am encouraged that the Government has established the Metropolitan Health Service in this State, which has meant a reduction in the proportion of the Health budget dedicated to administrative services and corporate activities. This is reflected in the current corporate reform project, which is designed to direct a greater proportion of funds away from administering the system and into the provision of patient care.