

NURSES EBA, WORKLOADS AND RECRUITMENT

Statement by Minister for Health

MR KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Health) [12.13 pm]: A coordinated approach to implement the nurses enterprise bargaining agreement and the recommendations of the New Vision, New Direction report is in place. This approach will bring nursing issues under the one umbrella. Most of the 40 EBA clauses have been implemented, and intensive work has commenced on the nursing workloads decision handed down last month by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The workload clause is one of the most significant changes aligning nursing hours to patient care demands.

Nursing hours required for each health service have already been collected and benchmarked, and the State Wide Nursing Workload Committee has been established. The committee's role will be advisory - reviewing, assessing and making recommendations to hospital executive nursing teams. Consultative workload committees will shortly be established at a local health service level. A comprehensive plan has been developed to implement the recommendations of the New Vision, New Direction report. Already, 25 of the 65 recommendations are being acted on.

A total of \$690 000 has been allocated for scholarships, and to date 117 postgraduate scholarships, 80 undergraduate scholarships and 23 re-registration scholarships have been awarded. A budget allocation of \$130 000 has been made this financial year for the provision of free re-entry courses, and already, in 2002, 22 nurses have completed the first part of the registered nurse program and another 30 enrolled nurses will commence their re-registration course at Royal Perth Hospital. A total of 82 nurses completed refresher courses in 2001, thereby bringing their clinical skills up to date prior to re-entering the work force. The New Vision, New Direction nursing and midwifery study identified that refresher and re-registration programs are the fastest and most economical recruitment strategy in the short term.

The report's recommendations concerning enrolled nurses have been acted on, and the comprehensive enrolled nurse education review is currently being scoped. This review will include the areas of initial preparation, post-registration courses and articulation to registered nurses. The issue of how unregulated health care workers articulate to enrolled nurses programs will also be examined.

A detailed plan has been developed to implement nurse practitioners in the government health industry. To get this working on the ground, the first draft legislation is being prepared by parliamentary counsel. A tender document for the provision of education courses that lead to nurse practitioner registration will be called for shortly. The enhanced role for midwives will enable authorised midwives in the government health sector to initiate a range of medications and routine laboratory investigations in maternity settings. Currently, drafting instructions for the legislative changes are being developed, and tenders for education courses will be called for shortly.

The next stage is to reduce government reliance on nurse agencies. This will be achieved by a multifaceted coordinated approach centred on -

- the implementation of the AIRC nursing workload decision;
- improvement in the management of casual pools, including the possible centralisation of the management functions and establishment of an internal government nursing agency; and
- the continuation of a coordinated, aggressive nurse recruitment drive.

All these initiatives will see this State well placed to get more nurses back into nursing, with ultimately the provision of the best health care possible for the community.