

HOSPITALS, IMPROVED FACILITIES IN REGIONAL AREAS

**857. Mr T.K. WALDRON to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the hospital bed crisis in Perth's major teaching hospitals.

- (1) Will the minister provide improved hospital facilities in regional areas so patients can be treated locally, therefore reducing demand on the State's major teaching hospitals?
- (2) Does the minister have a plan to better utilise our country hospitals?

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

- (1)-(2) The simple answer is yes and yes - that is already being done. The great difficulty with country hospitals is that their occupancy rates are often so low that it is difficult to maintain the desired efforts in the hospitals. However, whenever a person can be treated close to his or her home, obviously that is done. That is the issue confronting the Government. As I mentioned yesterday evening when speaking on radio about the doctor situation, whether the member for Wagin realises it or not, there is a shortage of specialist doctors, especially in country areas. Country hospitals are used to provide such services whenever possible.

The so-called "bed crisis" is a phrase that the member for Wagin and the Opposition generally are keen to use. Public hospitals cannot and will not shut their doors in the faces of patients. Unlike the private medical industry, the public system cannot do so. More people fronted at our emergency departments yesterday evening than have fronted in the recent history of hospitals; that is, something like 168 patients came to the front doors of the emergency hospitals yesterday evening. I thank the member for Wagin for the sensibility he displayed in asking the question about country people. The Leader of the Opposition could learn a lot from him. Yesterday evening 168 people came to the front doors of hospitals in the city alone. No doubt many of them would have been from country areas. The Government is producing better hospitals and has made available more nurses than ever to cope with the issues that have arisen in the country and the city. The simple answers to both the member's questions are yes and yes.

The SPEAKER: I call the members for Warren-Blackwood and Nedlands to order for the first time.