

LOWER GREAT SOUTHERN HEALTH SERVICE

330. Mr MASTERS to the Minister for Health:

I remind the minister of his statement in this place yesterday that the health budget will be re-configured so that resources can be directed to front-line health services.

- (1) Does the minister consider the Lower Great Southern Health Service a front-line health service?
- (2) If so, can the minister explain why, at a meeting held on 30 July 2001, Health Department officials informed senior staff from the Lower Great Southern Health Service that their budget for 2001-02 would be \$1.2 million less than expected costs?
- (3) Can the minister confirm that in order to address the shortfall in funds, the Lower Great Southern Health Service has canvassed the closure of beds at Albany Regional Hospital and the cessation of obstetrics at Plantagenet District Hospital and Denmark District Health Service?

Mr KUCERA replied:

- (1) I expect the Lower Great Southern Health Service to be a front-line service, as with all front-line services the Government expects to support in this State.
- (2) As I said yesterday, anything to do with budgets is pure speculation. In this State, traditionally, hospitals have applied for allocations of funds which far exceed their budgets, and the previous year's allocation. On every occasion, as with all State Government departments, they are expected to work within the budget parameter that is set. I have already said this year that the Government will not be cutting the global health budget in this State. Health services will be expected to work within their budgets, and the Government expects a return to accountability within the health service in this State. I note my predecessor as Minister for Health, the member for Darling Range, did not wear the propaganda badge put out yesterday by the Australian Medical Association, which shows his principles in this matter. I assure the member for Vasse that, each year, as I said, allocations requested by hospitals are the highest figure, the previous year's allocation is the lowest figure, and the agreed budget is somewhere in between. Any contemplation is speculation.
- (3) In another life, when I was on a front line, I would always put forward things that were uncomfortable, before coming back to the reality of what the budget must be. I have asked the Lower Great Southern Health Service to work within its budget, and to be accountable, but above all I have put all hospital managers on notice that they will be accountable to the people of their areas and to the taxpayers of this State.