

CORONAVIRUS — TESTING — YALGOO

95. Mr V.A. CATANIA to the Minister for Health:

I refer to concerning reports of a COVID-19 case in Yalgoo and comments from the shire president, Greg Payne, who said that after failing to obtain a PCR test locally, the family had to drive to a mine site for their son to be tested, highlighting the vulnerability of the local health system facing the threat of an outbreak. Yalgoo shire representatives raised concerns directly to the minister and her predecessor for the past five years about the ongoing closures of the nursing post. Will the minister commit to ensuring that Yalgoo has at least one nurse present at the nursing post during the working week plus one nurse for emergencies over the weekend?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

The gentleman in question experienced some difficulties accessing a PCR test when he had been directed by the Department of Health or the public health team to confirm a positive rapid antigen test. There are a couple of aspects to that question and those circumstances. The first is that the nursing post was not staffed at the time that he went there. There is funding in the budget to staff the nursing post. There are challenges in filling those roles. That is the reality across a range of remote posts. We fully commit to providing the funding and doing absolutely everything we can. I know the WA Country Health Service does everything it can to ensure that those posts are staffed. It is a challenging area to staff; the presentations are around 0.8 per day and it is extremely challenging. I am not going to shy away from that. But the funding is there, and we commit to doing the work.

There is sometimes unplanned leave when the individual staffing that post is unable to staff the post. There are alternatives for regional communities. In this instance, the gentleman was required to do a RAT, and he did the right thing. He contacted the health team and they asked him to go and do a PCR. The health team worked really closely; they bent over backwards to find the closest PCR. They contacted Rio Tinto and made sure he was able to go to a Rio site and get that PCR test, and not have to drive further to a public testing facility. The public health team did everything they could to accommodate the gentleman.

It is appropriate now that RATs have been approved as a diagnostic tool. If people are in a remote location and a PCR is not always available, the RAT can be accepted as an appropriate diagnostic tool. We do not require people in remote locations to drive hundreds of kilometres for a PCR test.