

ALBANY HEALTH CAMPUS — NURSE SHIFTS

**394. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to reports in *The West Australian* today that a nurse at Albany Health Campus recently undertook a 29.5-hour triple shift and concerns it is not an isolated incident.

- (1) How often are nurses being asked to undertake this dangerous practice and how is this safe for patients or staff?
- (2) What reviews of fatigue management are being undertaken?
- (3) Does the minister support calls for legislation banning triple shifts in hospitals; and, if not, why not?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. I start by absolutely, categorically agreeing that it is completely unacceptable that a nurse would do a triple shift—completely unacceptable. It is a very rare occurrence. Having said that, no-one should feel obliged to stay, whether they do it of their own accord or whether they are asked to. It should not occur. Even if someone elects to stay, they need to be told to go home. I am very clear about that. I have been absolutely clear about that with every health service provider and the Department of Health. In this particular instance, essentially the nurse involved was directed to go home. There was a miscommunication and she did not go home. It was not due to short staffing. They were adequately staffed and there were staff there. WA Country Health Service has investigated exactly what occurred, so there has been a thorough investigation. They were not short-staffed at the time. The direction was given for the member to finish their shift as scheduled but an error occurred through a miscommunication at handover, which resulted in the staff member working more hours than they should. The health service provider has taken immediate action to make sure it does not happen again, including changes to overtime protocol at the hospital and have apologised to the staff member involved. They have also communicated openly and transparently with the Australian Nursing Federation on the matter. A strategy has also been implemented to ensure that all overtime and extra shifts are approved by hospital executives during the day and by the on-call executive after-hours. The process for managing fatigue and overtime has since been reiterated with leaders to ensure they are well aware of their responsibilities when managing staff overtime. Information relating to double shifts is also included in a highly visible reporting system that has executive oversight. That will help prevent further occurrences at Albany Health Campus. Fatigue management and staff wellbeing are at the forefront of everything that they do. This was an isolated incident. It is not acceptable for anyone to either elect to or be asked to work a double shift, whether they are agency or paid employees.
- (3) On the matter of legislation, legislation already exists about safe workloads and safe practices. In fact, it is excellent legislation that was brought in by the current Minister for Industrial Relations about safe workplaces. Under that, safe work practices, including workload, are already regulated by the work health and safety legislation that was introduced by this government. There is an obligation on the employer to eliminate unsafe work practices and on the worker to take reasonable care for their own safety and health and make sure they do not affect the health and safety of others. Individuals can and should refuse a shift if they feel it is unsafe. They can and should raise the matter with their manager. They can and should raise it with WorkSafe and the union.