

MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS - RURAL AREAS

**997. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Health:**

Given that general practitioners have been encouraged to work with psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and mental health workers to provide early intervention, assessment and management of patients with mental illness, will the minister provide evidence that the extreme shortage of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and mental health workers has been addressed and that rural GPs will have adequate support?

**Hon SUE ELLERY replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of this question.

The WA Department of Health has a centrally coordinated recruitment process that has addressed attracting overseas-trained health professionals, including psychiatrists. Recent initiatives include an advertising campaign in the *British Medical Journal* in August 2006; representation at Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs coordinated events; representation at overseas expos in October 2005 and April and October 2006 to identify practitioners; the development and introduction of an online recruitment system to assist in fast-tracking applications; and the development and introduction of an online overseas-trained doctor web site and manual to attract potential recruits and provide a comprehensive introduction to working in Western Australia. The mental health division is now reimbursing area mental health services for relocation costs paid to new mental health employees, with \$4 000 being paid for those arriving from overseas, and \$2 000 being paid for interstate employees.

Under the mental health strategy 2004-07, 16.7 full-time equivalent mental health professionals have been recruited to rural and remote areas. This includes 5.3 FTE additional medical cover in the goldfields, south west and great southern regions. As part of the Council of Australian Governments' national action plan on mental health 2006-11, the commonwealth government agreed to provide funding for the provision of additional education places, scholarships and clinical training. An additional 30 mental health nursing places and 40 clinical psychologist positions have been allocated to Western Australia to date. All rural and remote public mental health services have multidisciplinary teams to respond to referrals from general practitioners in rural areas. Rural GPs have access to a psychiatrist 24 hours a day, seven days a week through a national call centre. In addition, GPs have access to Rurallink and SouthWest24 emergency telephone services. A COAG mental health rural and remote working group has been established in Western Australia to foster better collaboration of public mental health services with GPs and other non-government mental health service providers.