

HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT STAFF – VIOLENCE BY PATIENTS

370. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Minister for Health:

By way of a supplementary question, I will repeat the first part of the question. What is the minister doing to protect hospital emergency department staff against drug-fuelled, violent and abusive patients?

Mr J.A. McGINTY replied:

I can refer immediately to the policy of zero tolerance that is taken in emergency departments. If the Leader of the Opposition attends a hospital emergency department he will see posters everywhere saying that no tolerance will be given to anybody who engages in violent behaviour against staff. That is the first issue.

The second issue is that I have often intervened myself to urge members of staff who have been the victims of assault to lay charges. I have given an undertaking that not only will an assault charge be laid carrying the standard assault penalty, but also an assault charge against a public officer will be laid. If my memory serves me correctly the penalty for anyone who assaults a nurse or a doctor in an emergency department is 10 years' imprisonment.

The third measure that immediately springs to mind that we have taken was to improve the level of security in terms of security guards, security grilles and things of that nature, which have been installed in emergency departments in recent years and have gone a significant part of the way towards creating a safer work environment.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Drugs is the problem, isn't it, in emergency departments?

Mr J.A. McGINTY: Of course it is.

I make the point that when it comes to violence, bullying and intimidation against nurses, I would hope every member of this place would be of one mind and would have nothing to do with people who are bullies and who go out of their way to wreak havoc, whether it be in an emergency department or any other place in the workplace. I hope no member of this place would have anything to do with anyone who engages in that sort of behaviour.

The SPEAKER: I call to order the members for Roe, Cottesloe and Murray.