

WA COUNTRY HEALTH SERVICE MIDWEST MURCHISON

1090. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Health:

Given that the WA Country Health Service Midwest Murchison regional director, Shane Matthews, has dismissed claims of a move to salaried surgical staff, and his statement that there have been no changes to the private surgeons' scope of practice or to the availability of surgical lists, and that extra theatre time is negotiated wherever possible to reduce elective surgery waiting lists -

- (1) Will the minister indicate whether a surgeon will be appointed to replace the surgeon who recently resigned because of a contract disagreement?
- (2) If yes, when will that appointment take place?
- (3) If no, can the minister guarantee that there will be no serious implications for the availability of elective surgery in the mid-west?
- (4) Will the minister table the current waiting list and cancellations for elective surgery at Geraldton Regional Hospital?
- (5) Can the minister assure the house that the cancellation of elective surgery for the five weeks over Christmas and the new year is not due to budgetary constraints, given that it was reported in *The Geraldton Guardian* on Wednesday, 11 November 2006 that medical staff are angered by the hospital's move to do so?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

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

- (1) Yes, recruitment efforts are currently under way.
- (2) The WA Country Health Service Midwest Murchison is working collaboratively with the private hospital to recruit a replacement. Both parties have been working towards that end, but to date have been unsuccessful. Locum relief arrangements have been made by Geraldton Regional Hospital, and will be in place until a permanent replacement is appointed.
- (3) Given the current locum arrangements, there are no anticipated serious implications for elective surgery.
- (4) As at October 2006, the waitlist was: ear, nose and throat, 92; general surgery, 57; gynaecology, 15; ophthalmology, 27; orthopaedic surgery, 198; urology, 13; and general practitioner, 40, making a total of 442. There was no orthopaedic surgeon in the region for a period of three months during 2005-06, thereby causing a delay in the provision of non-urgent hip and knee replacement surgery. An additional orthopaedic list has been allocated each week to address the over-boundary patients. As at the end of October 2006, there were 35 surgery cancellations, of which 27 were patient initiated.
- (5) The closure of the operating theatres for elective surgery in many public hospitals, including Geraldton, over the holiday season has been occurring for many years. The decision is made in consultation with local staff. The key reasons have been a general desire of patients to not have surgery over the Christmas and New Year period, and an opportunity for general surgeons and theatre staff to take leave throughout the holiday period. Hospitals also use this time to perform routine maintenance on the operating theatres and equipment to minimise down time at other times of the year. Geraldton Regional Hospital will continue to have the capacity to perform emergency surgery at all times during this period, with a general surgeon and theatre nursing staff available to be recalled in such emergencies. Two orthopaedic theatre lists are also scheduled for this period. The scheduled theatre break will not influence the number of procedures conducted in 2006-07.