

NURSES, FUNDING OF REREGISTRATION AND REFRESHER COURSES

649. Mr MURRAY to the Minister for Health:

Has the minister had any feedback from nurses about comments made by the Australian Nursing Federation secretary, Mark Olson, relating to the funding of reregistration and refresher courses by the State Government?

Mr KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question. It has been brought to my attention that many nurses are horrified by Mr Olson's comments as reported in *The West Australian* today. I have also become aware of a large group of nurses who are currently undergoing reregistration courses, not because they want to get some letters after their name, but because they want to return to nursing. From my discussion with the opposition health spokesperson, I know that the Opposition fully understands the difficulties the Government is experiencing in attracting nurses when there is a global shortage. There is no quick fix.

I cannot believe that an advocate for the Nurses Federation would be opposed to the Government's program that seeks to employ more nurses and which is showing a great deal of promise. I will give members some figures on that program. This year 180 nurses participated in refresher and reregistration courses, and the number of school leavers choosing nursing as a first preference has jumped 20 per cent for the 2002 school year. These signs should be applauded and not denigrated. I also place on record my appreciation to the other union that represents nurses - the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union - for supporting the Government's efforts to boost the profession.

Mr Board: It is a coverage issue.

Mr KUCERA: I remind the member for Murdoch that the Government undertook to settle in excess of \$300 million on nurses' conditions and pay. The Government wants to make sure we have good underpinning to the health system of this State. More importantly, the Government values the people who do so much for the health system in this State - our nurses.