

HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT STAFF – VIOLENCE BY PATIENTS

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

I refer to claims by the Australian Medical Association that doctors and nurses in emergency departments in Western Australian public hospitals are taking self-defence courses because of the rising incidence of violence towards them by patients due to an increase in illicit drug use.

- (1) What is the minister doing to protect these hospital emergency department staff against drug-fuelled, violent and abusive patients?
- (2) Does the minister acknowledge that the Carpenter government's soft approach to illicit drug use has set the wrong example for youth and is a major factor in the increase in violence against hospital staff?

Mr J.A. McGINTY replied:

- (1)-(2) Of course we do not have a soft approach to drugs policy. Another thing that I must say is that I do not believe I have ever seen anyone, after having smoked marijuana, turn violent on hospital emergency department staff.

Several members interjected.

Mr J.A. McGINTY: The state has a very significant problem of amphetamine abuse. It was one that was recently addressed in the amphetamine summit, which was opened by the Premier and jointly chaired by the Commissioner of Police and the Director of Health. The summit examined ways, both from a health and law enforcement perspective, on how we could better respond to this issue. A number of important recommendations were made at that summit. Marijuana use remains unlawful. Anyone caught with marijuana faces penalties. The only distinction that has been made is whether it is to be a criminal offence to be carried with young, perhaps experimental, users for the rest of their lives, compromising their ability to gain employment and their ability to travel. Is that what members opposite want? Do they really want to return to the days when minor cannabis possession was a criminal offence?

Several members interjected.

Mr J.A. McGINTY: Do members opposite want to turn it back to being a criminal offence?

Mr C.J. Barnett: Every single thing has come to pass.

Mr J.A. McGINTY: Do members opposite want to turn it back to being a criminal offence? They will not answer, will they? That is because, frankly, they cannot.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Drug trafficking, amphetamines - everything you were warned of has come to pass.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Cottesloe to order for the first time!

Mr J.A. McGINTY: We are all aware of the links between drug abuse and mental health issues in particular. We are all aware that cannabis is a dangerous drug. We are all aware that amphetamine use is a current scourge affecting a very large number of young people. The question is: what is the appropriate penalty for somebody caught using cannabis perhaps experimentally? That is the question. It must remain an offence. It remains unlawful. The punishment for dealing with it is prescribed by the law.

Several members interjected.

Mr J.A. McGINTY: When I threw open the question to members opposite about whether they really wanted to make it a criminal offence so that people would have a criminal offence for the rest of their lives, there was no answer from them. That is the critical question. Do members opposite really want to make cannabis possession a criminal offence? Members opposite cannot and will not answer it.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I will.

Mr J.A. McGINTY: Come on! Members should put up their hands if they want it to be a criminal offence. Nobody. Not one. There is the answer to the question.

Dr J.M. Woollard interjected.

Dr S.C. Thomas interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the members for Alfred Cove and Capel to order!