

RURAL AND REGIONAL HOSPITALS

**353. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Minister for Health:**

Through parliamentary questions the opposition has obtained figures that show there is a disgraceful shortage of 103 nurses and 17 doctors in rural and regional hospitals. I combine this with the government's plans to close six country police stations and its inability to provide enough teachers for country schools.

- (1) Why is the government neglecting rural and regional Western Australia by not providing communities with enough doctors and nurses?
- (2) Will the minister concede that the government has failed to meet its election promise to fix the public health system in Western Australia?

**Mr J.A. McGINTY replied:**

- (1)-(2) In the entirety of rural and regional Western Australia, in which thousands of people are employed as doctors and nurses, we are 103 short. I will give one example of perhaps the most remote part of Western Australia. The government is spending \$200 million on rebuilding every hospital north of Port Hedland - these are in the most remote parts of this state. Members will find that currently under construction in the Kimberley region is, effectively, a new hospital in Broome. I was in Broome two weeks ago to inspect it. The rebuilding will build up the resources of Broome hospital to make it a regional resource centre to enable a lot more people from the Kimberley to be treated locally in their region. An amount of \$42 million will be spent on that upgrade. Up the road from Broome, at Derby, there is effectively a brand-new hospital. It is due to open within the next few weeks or maybe months.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** It will not be much good without enough nurses.

**Mr J.A. McGINTY:** There are enough nurses in Derby.

**Mr T. Buswell:** Not in Busselton.

**Mr J.A. McGINTY:** Members opposite should let me go through this to illustrate what this government has done. It has effectively rebuilt the Derby Regional Hospital. All that remains to be done is completing the landscaping of the area.

I go further down the road to the next town in the Kimberley, and I can tell this story in respect of the entirety of Western Australia. In Fitzroy Crossing, about which there has been much debate recently, the hospital is reaching fit-out stage. The government has integrated the local Aboriginal community health component into that hospital. It is a new state-of-the-art hospital for the entirety of the Fitzroy region.

We have the money to spend on Wyndham, and we recently upgraded the Kununurra hospital. Further south at Port Hedland, the regional resource centre for the Pilbara region, \$120 million has been spent on a new hospital, and that is on top of the \$14 million already spent on the aged care facility in that town. That adds up to \$200 million being spent on upgrading every single hospital and healthcare facility in the north of this state - the most remote part of Western Australia. However, the Leader of the Opposition has the cheek to come into this place and say that this government is neglecting the regions.

In addition, in the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's electorate, the government is trying to build a \$65 million state-of-the-art hospital that will provide for double the current emergency department capacity and a 50 per cent increase in the number of beds. That is due to be started in the not-too-distant future. There is no suggestion that we will not be able to staff a dramatically expanded hospital at Busselton, because one of the keys to attracting and retaining staff is to be able to offer them new, modern facilities in which to practice their professions. We all know that. Throughout the length and breadth of Western Australia, we are providing healthcare facilities that will have the benefit of attracting and retaining staff to work in them.

As members know, the government has a concrete plan to build up the six major regional centres in Western Australia to regional resource status so that they can treat a lot more people locally. We are seeing massive investment. Recently a brand-new hospital opened in Geraldton. We are doing the same by injecting massive investment into hospitals in Kalgoorlie, Bunbury and Albany as well as those in the north of the state to which I referred.

In the context of the international shortage of nurses and doctors, the government is recruiting from overseas and wherever it can.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** And you are failing. You promised to fix the health system in Western Australia and failed miserably.

**Mr J.A. McGINTY:** I will give a description of the failure. Since we came to government the number of nurses employed in the public hospital system has grown by 2 000; that is, an increase from 7 500 to 9 500

nurses. That is an increase of nearly a quarter in the number of nurses. In fact, it is probably more than a quarter - my maths let me down. We now have 2 000 extra nurses working in the public hospital system compared with the system we inherited. Does the opposition regard such a dramatic increase in the employment of nurses in the public hospital system, coupled with a commitment of \$4 000 million of this state's taxpayers' money channelled into rebuilding hospitals the length and breadth of the state, including the commitment to the regions to which I referred, to be a failure? In 6.5 years in government we have already built more hospitals in the regions than the opposition did in its eight years in government.