

KING EDWARD MEMORIAL HOSPITAL FOR WOMEN, PEPPERELL REVIEW

Statement by Minister for Health - Suspension of Standing Orders

On motion without notice by Mr R.F. Johnson, resolved with an absolute majority -

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the opposition parties to make a response not exceeding eight minutes to the brief ministerial statement regarding the report into King Edward Memorial Hospital.

Statement by Minister for Health - Response

MR M.F. BOARD (Murdoch) [2.56 pm]: I lead the opposition's response to the brief ministerial statement by the Minister for Health in the House today regarding the Pepperell report and issues surrounding stillbirths at King Edward Memorial Hospital.

At the outset, I indicate on behalf of the Opposition, and I am sure all members of Parliament today, our sincere sympathy to those mothers and families involved in the inquiry. Our attack and criticism today is not about King Edward Memorial Hospital itself. Our attack is not about the clinicians, the nursing staff, the midwives and people who work at hospital, but solely about the Government's response to the Douglas inquiry, and the fact that the Government has misled the Parliament and the community of Western Australia. As a result, two years after the tabling of the Douglas inquiry report, we are in a worse position today with our acute maternity hospital in Western Australia than we were at the start of the Douglas inquiry. The community is at risk, and the community is concerned. There is a cloud over that hospital that has not resulted from a lack of expertise at the hospital, but because recommendations have not been implemented and protocols that should be in place are not in place. We were informed that those protocols were established. As a result, our community is at risk.

Back in April 2000, the previous Government, following concerns raised in the community and this Parliament, asked Neil Douglas to conduct an inquiry into the clinical protocols and resources available at King Edward Memorial Hospital. Some 18 months later we got a report, after the expenditure of nearly \$7 million of taxpayers' money, and extension after extension and after the provision of additional resources. The previous Government did this because it needed to get to the bottom of the problem at King Edward Memorial Hospital and resolve the issue that clouded the hospital for a long time. A result was needed for the expenditure of taxpayers' money. What did we find? There were 237 recommendations from Neil Douglas. We then had a cover-up. Over 200 pages of that report were never revealed to the public. The critical issues regarding the protocols and senior clinicians never reached the public eye. We never had closure for the community. To this very day, apart from one outstanding case, we have no results from that inquiry. We are worse off today than we were when we started.

The previous Minister for Health stood in this place in June 2003, after a number of statements in the House regarding the Douglas inquiry, and stated -

Of the 237 recommendations contained in the Douglas inquiry report, all but four, which require legislative amendment, have now been signed off. . . . today marks a real milestone for King Edward Memorial Hospital - the beginning of a new and exciting phase for the hospital and the community it serves.

As a result of that statement, the community believed the Government of the day; people believed that change had occurred, protocols had been put in place, senior clinicians had been appointed and needed resources had been provided. What have we got? The situation at King Edward Memorial Hospital is worse today than ever.

Mr J.A. McGinty: What a load of rubbish.

Mr M.F. BOARD: The minister should ask the community how it feels today about King Edward Memorial Hospital. It is not the clinicians' fault; it is because people have been misled by this Government. Why did the minister come into this place today and sheet these concerns back to failure within the hospital? Why is the Government not accepting responsibility for not fulfilling its promise to the community and this Parliament? Why has the Government not talked about its failure to implement the recommendations in the report and the protocols? Why is the Government putting members of the community at risk? Why has it not explained its actions to the Western Australian community? What is the Government doing instead of talking about those issues? It is doing what it always does - floating a furphy about what it might do in six or eight years. It tries to change the agenda by saying things such as it will amalgamate King Edward Memorial Hospital with a tertiary hospital as though it is a new idea and has not been talked about for the past 20 years. Talk about reinventing the wheel. The then Minister for Health was talking about that six years ago. I was sitting in the present Minister for Health's very seat when he castigated him for that. The minister condemned the then minister for endorsing

a report from King Edward Memorial Hospital about its possible amalgamation with another hospital. Today the same idea has been floated to try to spread some good news and make it look as though this Government has vision. Despite the Reid report, the Government has not overseen one single improvement in the health system. It has deteriorated no matter which way we judge it. What is the Government going to do? It is going to float the recommendations in a report prepared by someone from the eastern States who has come over here to tell us how to fix up our system. On that basis, the Government wants to claim in the forthcoming election campaign that it has a vision for health. It is too late. Why have some of those recommendations not been implemented by now? Where will the extra beds come from and from where will people draw confidence in KEMH? Where will the clinical staff and resources come from? Those are the issues that should have been recommended today in Parliament but that has not happened. The Government has failed to fix the problems in the health system. It is not as though the Government has not been warned. I have here article after article, some of which were written after the Douglas inquiry: "Failure", "Perth hospital findings kept secret", "Gallop coy over probe on hospital", "Kucera to act on report" - that is excellent - "Lack of consultation was problem", "Risky births left to junior staff:". I have, I think, 35 newspaper articles warning the Government of the consequences, such as "Clinicians walking out", "Lack of resources" and "Midwives walking out". There is headline after headline but the Government has ignored them. Today the Government stands condemned for lack of action and for misleading the Western Australian community.

Statement by Minister for Health - Standing Orders Suspension

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Nollamara - Leader of the House) [3.04 pm]: I move without notice -

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the Leader of the National Party to make a response, not exceeding three minutes, to the brief ministerial statement regarding the report into King Edward Memorial Hospital.

It was the Government's understanding that the Opposition would allow the National Party three minutes, but it has broken its undertaking. I have moved this motion so that the National Party can respond.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call to order the member for Warren-Blackwood. If there is a dissenting voice I will need to divide the House.

Question put and passed with an absolute majority.

Statement by Minister for Health - Response

MR M.W. TRENORDEN (Avon - Leader of the National Party) [3.05 pm]: I thank the Leader of the House for this opportunity. I have only two points to make, which will not take long. I have asked a question on notice, but I would appreciate it if the minister could respond sooner and outline all outstanding liabilities facing not only King Edward Memorial Hospital but all hospitals. He answered a similar question of mine two years ago and I would like that information to be provided now. It is not a political issue; it is important that the Minister for Health advise the State of potential liabilities facing the State whether they have arisen from court cases or as a result of out-of-court settlements. That information would be useful to the State and the health system.

The other point is that the minister's predecessor initiated the inquiry into KEMH. I want to make it very clear that I am not picking on anyone in KEMH. Staff there are facing enough turmoil without people like me criticising them. The fact is that the Government's proposal was never going to succeed. Perusal of any management manual will indicate that if the same troops are left to operate a new procedure, the old culture will prevail. We made that point to the minister's predecessor two years ago. He made the point today that a new set of procedures would be implemented. I have had this discussion with Mike Daube and the previous minister. Unless there is a change in attitude the outcome will be the same as it was before. I do not say that lightly, but I know that from comments of people who have phoned me. The minister also knows, because he has been talking to KEMH people, that people there are concerned that some of the attitudes prevalent in the old system have remained in the hospital. To reiterate, any management manual will indicate that if the same manager is left in charge of a new procedure, some of the old culture will prevail. That is part of the minister's problem today.

Mr J.B. D'Orazio interjected.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: We must be fair to the hospital. Frankly, I do not want to pick on individuals. There has been enough of that. The problems stem from attitude and culture. It is important that KEMH reach a stage at which we can all say it is a credit to Western Australia and can offer an excellent service to women, both locally and in regional Western Australia. We want that to happen. That hospital has suffered enough pressure

and pain and it must cease. I made that point almost three years ago. If the minister does not take it into account this time, he will get the same result.