HOSPITALS — DEMAND RESPONSE PLAN

28.   Mr S.A. MILLMAN to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the unprecedented demand on health systems right across the country. Can the minister advise the house how the McGowan Labor government's demand response plan will bring additional beds into the system, including at Royal Perth Hospital, and can the minister outline to the house how this plan will support the continued delivery of world-class health care and put patients first?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for Mount Lawley, the parliamentary secretary, for joining me today at Royal Perth Hospital to announce the opening of the first 20 beds at Royal Perth Hospital as part of our 117-bed hospital expansion plan.

Can I first of all start by acknowledging that today is International Day of the Midwife. Once again, I am sure that I join all members in acknowledging midwives right across our great state and country and the wonderful work they do, in particular at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women, where we are experiencing similar demand at the moment. I am not quite sure what was happening eight or nine months ago, Madam Speaker, but King Eddy's is very busy at the moment! We are recruiting more midwives and doing our best to make sure that they have all the equipment that they need to work.

As I have said recently in this place, all our hospital systems right across the country are suffering from an increased step change in demand. This is represented in the volumes of people coming in, the acuity with which they come, the increase in mental health patients and also the impact that long-stay patients, particularly those waiting for NDIS assessments and referrals, are having on patient flow. All our hospitals right across the country are suffering from a huge increase in demand. The McGowan government's demand response plan is all about making sure that our hospitals have the equipment and the staff they need to make sure that we can adapt to this new environment.

We have 95 new emergency department beds that are either under construction or soon will be, as part of the biggest expansion of emergency department capacity in the state's history. This includes an election commitment for two new mental health emergency centres and behavioural assessment urgent care clinics, at Rockingham of 10 beds and at Armadale hospital of nine beds. Our ED expansion plan also includes beds at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and at the Midland and Joondalup emergency departments. Of course, as the members for Mandurah, Murray–Wellington and Dawesville will tell us, in Peel the newly expanded ED that opened in February adds a fast-track triage area, new waiting room and seven-bed short-stay unit.

Along with EDs, we are increasing our inpatient hospital beds, with more than 500 new beds being added to our WA public hospitals, 95 in emergency departments, as I mentioned, and 117 extra beds from existing stock across the Perth and Peel area. Today, as I said, I opened 26 of these beds at Royal Perth Hospital. Last week, 24 beds were opened in Fremantle Hospital, and new beds at Osborne Park Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital will open in July, in addition to the more than 300 beds coming online as part of our significant health infrastructure program, which includes Geraldton Health Campus, Bunbury Hospital, Joondalup Health Campus and Peel Health Campus with, as I said, a $152 million development.

Beds alone are not the answer. We need staff to run those beds, nurses to stand by them and doctors to treat patients. Over the past year of COVID-19, which has hindered our efforts to attract staff from abroad and outside Western Australia, we have been working tirelessly to make sure that we increase that number. The McGowan government is providing positions for an extra 600 newly qualified nurses at WA hospitals over the next two years. This includes 400 registered and enrolled nurses announced as part of our election campaign. More than 200 of these nurses are already in the wards today, working in both general and mental health areas. This will mean that we will have 1 000 new nurses this year, in 2021, and 1 000 new nurses in 2022, not only providing an important boost to our health system, but also making sure that we provide great careers and opportunities for young people coming into our health system. We have been working hard on this program since the back end of 2020, when we saw a significant change in the way that people are presenting to our hospitals as we came out of the initial stage of the pandemic. We have a plan and we are working to that plan. We can see that plan starting to work. The McGowan government will continue to put patients first.