

ALMA STREET CLINIC — PATIENT INFORMATION

Statement

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [9.50 pm]: This afternoon in question time I pursued for the second consecutive day the incident on Thursday, 25 July 2013, which was a couple of weeks ago, when a document containing confidential information relating to mental health patients was found literally blowing around on a Fremantle street. For the benefit of honourable members, I remind the house of my questions both yesterday and today. The first question was: when was the minister made aware of the incident? I went on to ask: What information did the document contain? Was the document printed by an employee of the clinic? Has an investigation been carried out into the incident; and, if so, who carried out the investigation and what was the outcome? Were the patients whose confidentiality was breached informed of the breach? I want to give honourable members a bit of background to the reason I am asking these questions. Some of it will be obvious from the nature of the questions, but I want to fill in a bit of the background. As I indicated, the paper concerned was literally picked up off the street. Apparently the person who found it was on their way to meet a friend for lunch, saw the piece of paper blowing around on the ground, picked it up and obviously had a look at what was written on it. They could see that it was some sort of official document and they became increasingly concerned as they realised that it had highly confidential and sensitive information about patients who were clearly mental health patients, because one of the pieces of information contained on the document was the diagnosis of the patients' condition. We cannot be sure how long the piece of paper had been there, but I understand that at the bottom of the documents there is, as there is on many computer printouts, a time and date of printing, which indicated that the document was printed out sometime around nine o'clock that morning. I understand it was found around about 11.00 or 11.30 that morning. The person who found the piece of paper then took it into the Alma Street centre, which is close to where the document was found. I am told that the person went into the centre and asked to see a senior person to hand the piece of paper over to. The person did not just go in and hand it over at the reception counter; they asked to see a senior person. We would assume that the person who received the piece of paper was the clinical manager. I am told that when the clinical manager saw what the piece of paper was, he went white; he went very pale and was obviously quite shocked to see what was being handed in. As I said, the person who found the document became very concerned and even upset about what they had found, and that person subsequently contacted me.

The Alma Street clinic has been in the news a lot recently. It was essentially the subject of the Stokes report on the discharge of mental health patients and there were a number of important and critical recommendations made as a result of that inquiry. As recently as today there was another issue about Alma Street raised in question time in this place regarding the handling, again of very sensitive material, with questions raised about the way that material was handled.

Let me go back to the nature of my question to the minister. Members will notice that the first part of my question was: when was the minister made aware of the incident? When I asked that question yesterday, I was not seriously expecting the minister to have been informed about the handing in of the piece of paper, and that is why I gave some notice of the question. It was submitted around 10.00 or 11.00 in the morning and I asked the question at 4.30 in the afternoon. Of course, we found out at that stage that nobody knew about the incident.

I was not expecting the minister to know, but I was expecting her to come into this place four or five hours after I had asked the question to give the house a bit of information. As of yesterday nobody knew. The key point here is that nobody would know now if we had not raised it in this place. There is something seriously wrong with a system that can allow that to happen. Today we have a little more information. The minister told us today that it was an inpatient team list printed by an employee. She also told us that the mental health executive is doing an internal investigation. As I say, we have this much information only because we raised the matter in the Parliament. What further questions does this raise? Clearly it raises the question of how many other pieces of paper there might have been. One piece of paper was found and handed in. Were there other pieces of paper? Another question is: how many other times has this happened? We were lucky on this occasion that the person who found it worked out what it was and took it straight back into the clinic. How many other times has this happened? What on earth is wrong with the document control system at Fremantle Hospital? The minister told us today that the document was in someone's pocket. There is something dramatically wrong with a document control system when sensitive information like this can end up in someone's pocket—can be taken out of a file. The basic rule of document control is: do not take the documents away. Clearly, there is something very wrong.

The last part of the question I asked yesterday and today was whether the patients whose confidentiality had been breached had been informed of the breach. That is when we found out that they had not been informed because—I think this is frankly appalling—their names have been lost in an information technology upgrade at the Alma Street centre. We are talking about something that happened only two weeks ago, yet nobody at the centre can work out who the patients were at that stage. What really upsets me about this is that not once during

the minister's fairly lengthy answer today did she talk about the appalling gaps in the way mental health patients are cared for at Alma Street. This minister's job is not to defend the staff; it is not to defend a shonky system; it is to defend the rights of patients, who are among the most vulnerable people in this state.

Tonight I want to give the minister a copy of this document because, fortunately, someone in this state puts the rights of people —

The PRESIDENT: Order! Are you passing that to the minister as a courtesy or are you tabling that document?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: As a courtesy, Mr President.

The PRESIDENT: Okay.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am not tabling the document, Mr President; it contains highly confidential, sensitive information that the minister cannot get from her department—from the staff at the Alma Street centre. Someone gave me that document tonight.

Hon Helen Morton: What makes you think I can't get it?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It appeared under my door tonight, so I give it to the minister. I do not know what the minister will do with this mess.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! If that raises a few questions in people's minds, they can get up and make a comment later.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: There is a growing list of incidents in which patients' rights have clearly not been on the minister's priority list. There is the case of the unregistered psychiatrist at Graylands, who we believe may have been holding senior positions when he was not registered to practice as a psychiatrist. There is the terrible case of Tristan Dimer, which I suspect still has a long way to go. There is the botched introduction of the disability justice centres into Western Australia which, again, are supposed to be caring for some of the most vulnerable people in our community. In all these incidents we have seen the minister give priority to something other than the welfare and the rights of the patients. What is still missing in this sorry story is how things will change in the future so that these kinds of mistakes cannot happen again. I put it to the minister, through you, Mr President, that we must know the results of the investigation that is now being carried out at the Alma Street centre. We must know that this terrible fault in the system that resulted in patients' confidential information blowing around the streets of Fremantle has been fixed. It is incumbent on this minister to come back into this place at some point in the near future and explain to the house how that fault with the system has been fixed.