

**CORONAVIRUS — MT LAWLEY COMMUNITY**

*Grievance*

**MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley)** [9.53 am]: My grievance this morning is also to the Minister for Health. It concerns the coronavirus, or COVID-19. Unquestionably, this virus will affect our whole community, but there are particular reasons that I raise this issue on behalf of the community of Mt Lawley. As the minister knows, a number of health professionals and allied health professionals live and work in my community—doctors, nurses, general practitioners and pharmacists. The GP clinics in my electorate include GP on Beaufort; Third Avenue Surgery, down the road from Mount Lawley Primary School; Lindisfarne Medical Group; and DR7 Medical Centre in Yokine. The pharmacists in my electorate include Beaufort Chemist, across the road from our electorate office on the corner of Beaufort and Walcott Streets; McKenzies Compounding Chemist, which is a little further up the road; and The Dispensary, on the corner of Beaufort Street and Third Avenue, across the road from Third Avenue Surgery. We also have many health professionals working in our public hospitals, like Royal Perth Hospital, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Osborne Park Hospital. I take a moment now to commend the work that they and the professionals working in our private hospitals, like St John of God Mount Lawley Hospital, have done in response to the coronavirus.

The “Western Australian Government Pandemic Plan” describes at-risk groups at paragraph 2.8.3, stating that people living in close communities such as nursing homes may also be more vulnerable. I note the 17 retirement villages in the electorate of Mount Lawley. An above-average proportion of our population is aged over 65, including the people living in those nursing homes. The minister can see that the electorate of Mount Lawley is well aware of COVID-19. However, the initial response from my community has been incredibly heartening. There is the Mt Lawley Community Facebook page. Members would be aware of this and probably have something similar in their own communities. The Mt Lawley Community Facebook page has been a great site of community endeavour in the last couple of days. Members of the community have posted on the Mt Lawley Facebook page that they would assist those who were confined to their residences by, for example, making deliveries to them or doing grocery shopping for them. It calls to mind an article on the situation in Italy that I saw on *The Guardian* website yesterday. It was an opinion piece by Jamie Mackay titled “Under coronavirus lockdown, Italy is finding a fragile sense of solidarity”. I will come back to that article later, but I wanted to highlight for members, and for the minister, this sense of solidarity that is emerging in Mt Lawley.

As the minister would be aware, we also have some fantastic innovators and entrepreneurs who are trying to see whether their endeavours can assist the government and health professionals in identifying this disease. I have spoken before about Brian Leadman’s company ResApp Health Limited and the work that it does. ResApp is a smart phone application that can detect respiratory disease—upper and lower respiratory tract infections. I understand that Mr Leadman and his company are trying to identify a signature cough so that COVID-19 can be identified. The struggle at the moment is that in order for the algorithm to work, Mr Leadman and his researchers need access to a significant sample set of patients, and in Australia we have only had just over 100 confirmed cases. The World Health Organization overnight declared a pandemic, so we need a few things. We need the existing testing regime to be accessible. There are two PathWest collection centres close to my community, in Leederville and Osborne Park; PathWest has its mobile collection facility; and the state government has opened new COVID-19 clinics at Royal Perth and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospitals.

When I come to consider this government’s response to COVID-19, I refer to an article titled “Going global” published in the Leaders section of *The Economist* last week, which states —

IN PUBLIC HEALTH, honesty is worth a lot more than hope. It has become clear in the past week that the new viral disease, covid-19 ... will spread around the world.

The authors of the article go on to note three things that the government in China has done well in order to contain the spread of the disease. Firstly, it provided clear unambiguous communication at an early stage. Secondly, governments can slow the spread of the disease and flatten the spike of the epidemic, which means that health systems are less overwhelmed. That not only flattens the spike, but also delays the spike. Thirdly, it is necessary for us to prepare health systems for what is to come. I take the examples that are outlined in last week’s article from *The Economist* and note the steps that the government has taken to address those three things, but the fact remains that as a son of two parents who are in their 70s and as a dad of two boys who are both less than 10 years old, the spread of this virus remains a particular concern. My grievance to the minister this morning is this: What can be done to support the health and allied health workers who live and work in Mt Lawley? What can be done to provide comfort to seniors living in retirement homes? What can be done to promote the nascent community solidarity that we are already seeing through the Mt Lawley Community Facebook page as we tackle this virus?

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health)** [10.00 am]: I thank the member for his grievance this morning. It provides me with an opportunity to update the chamber on the current count in Western Australia. We have no new cases in Western Australia as of this morning, which is a very pleasing result, particularly as we see the spread of

the virus around the world. As the member observed, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic. That changes nothing for Western Australia. We have been on pandemic footing for some time now, and we are implementing our plans and strategies to protect the Western Australian community as best we can. Yesterday, the Premier and I released our pandemic plan to inform members about what we are doing in this space. Obviously, there is a range of issues, which I will come to shortly, that will be very informative for the member's constituents.

The President of the United States has banned all travel from Europe to the US. That is obviously a step change—a significant development in the issue. From this layperson's perspective, I suspect that that will have absolutely no impact at all in the spread of the disease in the US as it is already well and truly experiencing sustained community transmission of the virus. From that perspective, I think Trump's announcement is more about appearance than effective public health policy, but I understand that the President has to make these decisions. I also saw that Tom Hanks and his family have got coronavirus, and they have been holidaying in Queensland. They are about to extend their holiday by another good two weeks, I would suggest, and that underpins just how quickly this virus can take hold.

The pandemic plan identifies vulnerable groups within our populations that we have to be very cognisant of in serving the community. As the member observed, he has a lot of retirees and residential aged-care facilities in his electorate, and they are a particularly vulnerable cohort. This is a reason I was at the Aegis aged-care facility in Como on the weekend, highlighting the importance of ensuring that we protect vulnerable groups within our population. Obviously, older people and people with compromised immune systems are the most vulnerable to COVID-19. That is why it is important that we are very cognisant of the impact that this will have upon people in our residential aged-care facilities. We have been doing a range of work to ensure that we have good hygiene and infection control regimes in all our residential aged-care facilities, and making sure we take every opportunity to limit the impact on it.

The member for Mount Lawley appropriately acknowledged his community and the commitments it has made to look after each other. This is what we have to do. We are all in this together; this is a community effort. We can make sure that we hold off this disease if we all take the opportunity to look after ourselves and our personal hygiene habits. People need to wash their hands and cough or sneeze into the crook of their arm or into a tissue, and throw that tissue away. Do not do as I did at a press conference the other day, which is to momentarily choke on a bit of lunch that I had wolfed down just before the press conference and spontaneously cough into my hand. Cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm or into a tissue. If people are unwell, if they are experiencing any cold or flu-like symptoms, they need to make sure that they do not have close contact with others, their family, friends, and in particular, aged-care residents in those facilities. This is a time that people should not visit older people in a residential aged-care facility. We love our parents and we love our grandparents, but if we are unwell, it is very important that we do not take those bugs into those facilities.

The member mentioned the ResApp. We have been doing some work with Dr Leedman and his team to try to access that sample data, but he needs about 100 unwell people with COVID-19 to try to get those signature messages. I am sure they will be able to assess that group, unfortunately, in good time, but not as yet. The ResApp is a great little health innovation that is Western Australian grown. Brian Leedman and his team are doing a great job in promoting that around the world.

The COVID clinics are an important part of what we are doing. I want to clarify a point that the member for Baldivis raised with me in the corridor yesterday. We have COVID clinics in each of our adult tertiary hospitals—Royal Perth Hospital, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Fiona Stanley Hospital. They are going well. Yesterday, just over 750 people attended those, slightly fewer than the first day. I think about 400 people were tested. Yesterday, we also announced our new collection centres for people suffering from respiratory illness and suspected impact of COVID-19. Those clinics are dedicated for people with suspected COVID symptoms or impacts. We do not want them to go to other clinics. I apologise for misleading the member for Baldivis on that. We want people to go to these dedicated collection centres. That may mean a certain amount of inconvenience to those patients, and I acknowledge that, but it is important that we keep them away from other people who are attending PathWest collection clinics.

Finally, #FlattenTheCurve is the new hashtag. I am embracing it. Everyone who is on Twitter, look at #FlattenTheCurve and see how we can all work together to push off and lower the impact of this disease.