

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS — INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL AID PROJECTS

143. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Minister for Health:

I acknowledge the year 9 and 10 students in the public gallery from Ashdale Secondary College in the member for Wanneroo's electorate.

I was pleased to see that health professionals working in the state's public sector can now receive financial support to work on international and local aid projects. I hope the minister can update the house on how the scheme will work and provide us with some more information about it.

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

I thank the member for the question. I am very pleased with this project that the Department of Health and I have been working on for a long time. It has the potential to significantly boost morale within the Department of Health, particularly among the doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists who are working for the department. This will give them the opportunity to do international aid work while being supported by the government. It is very similar to what people in the Army Reserves can do. People who are in the Army Reserve can work for up to two weeks and still get their base rate of salary. This will allow doctors, nurses, OTs and physios to do the same. They can work internationally for up to 10 days while still receiving their base salary from the government. To begin with, financial support will be provided for up to 50 people throughout the year while we see how it works. It will cost the government about \$500 000 to support that. We are also working with some of the doctors who, as part of their salary allowance, already have an opportunity to go to conferences or to take study leave, and we will encourage them instead, with some support through funding that is already available in government to help with accommodation and travel, to do aid work.

We are also assisting Dr Bruce Robinson who has a website that is internationally accessible. We will upgrade the quality of that website and it will allow people, both government and non-government, to register that they are going overseas to do aid work with groups such as Rafiki, which does cleft lip and palate surgery in Tanzania, or with Indigenous communities; Dr Ian Constable, for example, goes to the Kimberley and does eye work with Indigenous communities there. The website will allow all those who work within the health system to register, see who is doing what and who is going where, offer their additional services to join with groups that do international aid work or, alternatively, form groups themselves to do that aid work. We particularly encourage people to go to the South-East Asian region. The website will also enable people from other countries, particularly South-East Asian countries, to post a statement outlining where they have a desperate need in a particular area. It might, for example, be children needing ear surgery in, say, Cambodia. Doctors, nurses and specialists in Perth can see that statement on the website and form a team to do that work.

I think this is a fantastic opportunity for our health system staff. I am really excited that it is finally underway. It has taken me a while to work through some of the difficulties in getting it all planned. This will link in and add to the international aid work that we already do in Tanzania, with our chief nurse forming teams of people who aid Tanzania—at the request, I might add, of the federal Labor Minister for Defence, Stephen Smith.