

NEWMAN — GENERAL PRACTITIONER SERVICES

**418. Hon HELEN BULLOCK to the minister representing the Minister for Health:**

- (1) What is the optimum number of general practitioners that should be based in Newman to service the present population and surrounding fly in, fly out mine sites?
- (2) Is the minister aware that residents were informed that only one GP was available during the weekend of 21 and 22 May 2011, and only two GPs would be providing services to the medical centre and Newman District Hospital this week, between 23 and 27 May?
- (3) If yes to (2), what was the reason for the GP shortage?
- (4) What plans were in place to deal with any major emergencies during the periods mentioned in (2)?

**Hon HELEN MORTON replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question. The following information has been provided to me by the Minister for Health.

- (1) In August 2000 the Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee suggested a benchmark of one general practitioner for every 905 people. However, this figure does not account for socioeconomic status, elevated proportions of high-needs patients, or local variations in general practitioners and the kind of work they and other healthcare personnel provide to the community. Based on population projections for Newman provided by Heuris Partners and local staff, it is predicted that a total population of 12 000 fly in, fly out workers will draw on town services by 2015. This means the population of Newman will require nine general practitioners.
- (2) No. Newman hospital was adequately staffed to provide emergency department services to the community of Newman throughout those periods. The provision of primary health care is a commonwealth government responsibility.
- (3) There is ongoing difficulty throughout Western Australia in the recruitment of doctors who are appropriately credentialed to provide services in rural and remote practices. The WA Country Health Service is working closely with the commonwealth, Rural Health West and other stakeholders to improve access to general practitioner services and primary health care throughout rural WA.
- (4) Emergency services are covered through a private contract with Kinetic Health in Karratha, which provides 24-hour–seven days a week coverage to the Newman hospital emergency department including after-hours and on-call services.