

INTERNATIONAL SKILLS AND TRAINING INSTITUTE IN HEALTH

**489. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Minister for Health:**

I understand that the Liberal–National government has approved funding to the International Skills and Training Institute in Health. I understand that this will make it easier for doctors and nurses to provide aid and clinical expertise to developing countries. Can the minister please inform the house of details surrounding this landmark funding?

**Dr K.D. HAMES replied:**

I thank the member for the question. This follows on from an issue I raised in this house last year when we provided this opportunity for our health staff within our hospital in a similar way to what the Army Reserve does to be able to do volunteer work in overseas countries, particularly through the South East Asian rim. As part of that we have made some funding available for a group called International Skills and Training Institute in Health—ISTIH. That group is a collaboration between the University of Western Australia, Curtin University and the Department of Health created to assist in improving the skills of health workers, particularly in South East Asian countries. There is a website and teams of health workers are often sent to other countries to provide aid work. As part of that, they train the locals in doing whatever health work that is required. We saw this as the ideal vehicle for us to use for the system that we were promoting, so we provided a grant of \$30 000 initially to assist with the expansion of that website to cover all the things that we want that website to do. There is \$150 000 in additional funding each for two years to help develop that program of providing those opportunities for our health staff. It will mean that someone who is, say, a nurse working in one of our hospitals will be able to get on that website. That website, hopefully, as it develops will have the details of all those who currently provide volunteer international aid work. Even those groups that do not want to be associated with what we are doing, such as the Rafiki group, which already sends teams of health workers to Tanzania, will have all their details on the website. The nurse can get on that website and say, “Yes, that is something I’d like to do”, get the contact details for the group and volunteer their services to go away with that particular group. We are also trying to link it to governments in other countries, so that if, for example, the government in Vietnam had a particular area of health need, it would be able to put on our website—“our” meaning the combined group of three organisations that are supporting this—that it desperately needs help for children with middle ear problems. Our health department people will be able to look at that site, see the need and form a team, if they so wish, to go away.

**Mr J.N. Hyde:** Yesterday, you said your department was only about hospitals. Now the first question you lead off on —

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** How facetious—what a load of nonsense that is! This is a great program that provides opportunities for all our health staff to provide international aid, which is something the member should be promoting, particularly because they have the opportunity to go to the countries he so frequently visits. Health staff will be able to go to those countries and provide aid work to help the less fortunate in our society. It provides a great opportunity for training for our own staff. Our own staff will be able to provide that additional international aid work and get great experience from it, including with our own remote Aboriginal communities. If that is one of the programs that our people want to do, they can form a team and go do that work. Hopefully, fantastic workers, such as the Minister for Education’s husband who does work in remote Indigenous communities, particularly Warmun, will put on that website what they do. People working within our health system, including allied health workers, such as psychologists, physiotherapists and the like, will be able to volunteer to join that team and provide additional work in Indigenous communities. I think it is a fantastic program. The purpose of the question today is to give me the opportunity to talk about the additional funding that we are providing, which I think will create a fantastic website which all our staff can access and through which they can make themselves available to do this sort of relief work.