

HOSPITALS — EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS — STAFFING

**102. Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE to the Minister for Health:**

I refer the minister to warnings by the director of emergency medicine at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Dr Peter Allely, regarding staffing shortages —

“As winter approaches there will be more avoidable deaths in our department in the coming months unless changes are made,” ...

Does the minister accept the warnings of this highly qualified physician; and, if not, why not?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

I thank the member for the question. The point to be made is that, ultimately, it is the responsibility of the health service providers to make sure that they have the configuration of staff that meets the needs of their hospitals. This is not the responsibility of the Minister for Health. I do not strut up and down the corridors of the wards counting the numbers of nurses, doctors and allied health staff to ensure that they are there. This is the reason we have the health service providers, and the reason we have such a strong system. This is the reason the emergency departments in Western Australia were found by the Productivity Commission to be the best in the country. In addition to that —

**Dr M.D. Nahan:** On our watch.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** No, Leader of the Opposition, under our watch.

The Productivity Commission also found that our emergency departments were the only emergency departments, in the last 12 months of the Leader of the Opposition's hapless and useless leadership of the other side, to have actually improved in the past 12 months. I completely reject the impugned accusation from the member for Churchlands. Our emergency departments are working extremely well.

It is true that, since 2008, which is the period in which the doctor in this particular instance has made his observations—that is, eight and a half years of the time the previous government was in office—there has been an increase in demand on our emergency departments. That is true, and as a result of that, when we came to power in 2017 we had a plan for how we were going to reduce the demand in our EDs. This stands in stark contrast to the claims by my very good friend Hon Kim Hames, when he said, after questioning from me about ambulance ramping and things of that nature, “I give up.” That was the Liberal Party's approach to ED congestion—“I give up.” We are putting in place a range of mechanisms to improve the situation. We are putting in urgent care clinic toxicology units at Royal Perth Hospital, a mental health observation area at RPH, and a mental health emergency centre at Midland Public Hospital. We are implementing urgent care clinics to take the pressure off our EDs. We have a plan, and that is one of the reasons our EDs are the best in the country.

I do not doubt that it is tough and hard working in our emergency departments. The doctors and nurses working on the front line do a great job, but there has not been any reduction in clinicians in the EDs, commensurate with the increase in demand. The staff-to-patient ratios have remained the same as they always have been, and as they have always been in other health service providers, the South Metropolitan Health Service and the East Metropolitan Health Service. We will continue to work with those staff to make sure that they are supported. I reject the idea that somehow we are facing some sort of crisis. Quite frankly, I understand why the opposition is onto this issue—because it has nothing else.