



**The Hon Roger Cook MLA
Deputy Premier
Minister for Health; Mental Health**



Our Ref: 60-09679
Your Ref: Petition No 57 (A693898)

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Mr Swinbourn

Matt,

Thank you for your letter of 14 June 2018 pertaining to petition no 057 – Christian prayer room at Perth Children’s Hospital (PCH) and for the opportunity to respond to the petition.

Previously, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children (PMH) operated a multi-faith approach to pastoral care for over 20 years, and it worked very well. All aspects of that service are available at PCH, where comfort, spiritual, religious support and solace for patients and their families, carers and visitors both at the bedside and in the multi-faith centre continue to be provided. Hospital staff also utilise the multi-faith centre.

In April 2017, the Premier of Western Australia, Hon Mark McGowan MLA, wrote to Ms Fernandez to confirm that our Government is supportive of the facility and pastoral care model at PCH.

Contrary to Ms Fernandez’s views, I am confident that the multi-faith centre and pastoral care model at PCH meets the emotional and spiritual needs of unwell children and their families, hospital employees and visitors.

I unequivocally reject Ms Fernandez’s assertion that Christian worshippers are being discriminated against. The decision to provide a multi-faith centre does not marginalise or privilege one religious group over another, but provides a multi-cultural inclusive space that equally respects each person’s right to their own religious beliefs and preferences. The multi-faith centre welcomes people of all denominations, as well as those of no religion. It also provides resources appropriate to specific faiths.

The multi-faith centre model is considered contemporary best practice design in hospitals, as well as academic institutions.

Admitted patient data from 2013/14 indicates that patients and their families at PMH/PCH have religions ranging from the Christian-based faiths to Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, Hinduism and Baha'i, with 49 percent declaring no religion. This data reinforces that the current model is appropriate.

It is the Government's view that the multi-faith centre model does not devalue the purpose of the centre; on the contrary, the good will and inclusion demonstrated by those who use the multi-faith centre, who come from a broad range of faiths, is invaluable in a secular nation such as ours.

I have visited the multi-faith centre at PCH and find it to be a welcoming, inclusive space which will benefit patients and their families, as well as staff, for many years to come.

Ms Fernandez has extensively lobbied for a separate Christian chapel at PCH. She has written approximately 14 times over the last four years on this matter. However, although the physical layout of the multi-faith centre at PMH may have had the appearance of separating facilities, this was only because of the physical constraints of the buildings that were available at PMH. Ms Fernandez has persisted in her campaign despite being informed of this multiple times.

While Ms Fernandez claims that she 'with other Christians' have campaigned for changes to the pastoral care model at PCH, it should be noted that the hospital complaints department, the Child and Family Engagement Service, have not received any complaints from patients or families pertaining to the multi-faith centre, and that the overwhelming majority of correspondence on this matter has been received from Ms Fernandez.

I am extremely proud of the multi-faith centre model at PCH. Western Australia is a diverse, welcoming State, without the need for brick walls to segregate those of differing religious beliefs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Roger Cook', written over a light blue circular stamp.

HON ROGER COOK MLA
DEPUTY PREMIER
MINISTER FOR HEALTH; MENTAL HEALTH

11 JUL 2018