

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**WRITTEN QUESTION**

Ms J Carney

to Minister for Health

RDH Nurse Shortages

- 1) Minister, the health budget appears to have done nothing to address the ongoing concerns of nurses at Royal Darwin Hospital; nor does it acknowledge, let alone seek to address, the shortages of nurses in our hospitals;
 - a) Why have you ignored the nurses, and what do you say to Territorians like the Minister for Family and Community services who have to wait up to 24 hours to be attended to when they present to Accident and Emergency?

ANSWER

- 1) This Government has worked very hard to address the nursing shortage, a shortage which has not only affected the Northern Territory, but is acknowledged Australia-wide.

In 2001 a commitment was made to create 75 new hospital nurse positions. This was exceeded with over 100 extra nurses in the Northern Territory – both within and outside our public hospitals. In 2005 a further commitment has been made to increase nursing numbers in Acute Care by a further 75 from 2005-2009.

In addition, an NT Wide Recruitment Campaign has commenced for nursing. This campaign includes overseas recruitment with the Executive Directors of Nursing from Alice Springs and Tennant Creek travelling to the United Kingdom to recruit nurses for the whole of the Northern Territory. Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH) has also undertaken recruitment of several Zimbabwean nurses who have already commenced.

Plans are also underway to increase the employment, and expand the scope of practice for enrolled nurses.

- a) While I cannot comment on specific cases, over the past 12 months, the hospital has regularly experienced "Access Block" in the Emergency Department (ED). This is a national phenomenon, which is manifested by an inability to move presenting patients requiring admission to a bed within the hospital. During their time in the ED, patients are of course, treated and afforded first rate care by medical and nursing staff in that area. Other very important initiatives include the expansion of Hospital in the Home, and the introduction of a Discharge Lounge.

There are strategies in place to alleviate pressure on our ED, such as our new Call Centre, enabling Territorians to get medical advice over the phone and make informed decisions on when and where to seek care. The Government has also made a commitment for an additional 24 beds at RDH in this term, which will increase capacity to meet the increasing demand.

Finally, attention to the various matters raised will continue, and will be further informed by a review of the ED recently completed by Professor Bryant Stokes.