

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mrs Finocchiaro to the Minister for Health:

Remote Clinics

- 1. How many remote health clinics in the Northern Territory have been without a full complement of medical and nursing staff?**

Top End Health Service and Central Australia Health Service Primary Health Care Services are responsible for the staffing of NTG remote health clinics. Both Services are able to utilise existing resources within other health centres and relocate to cover gaps whilst recruitment for vacant positions occurs. Alternatively, locum doctors or agency nurses are used to ensure continuity of care in all remote health clinics. This situation is dynamic and constantly changing.

- 2. Which clinics are they and what is being done to address the shortages?**

As stated above, staffing of remote health centres is dynamic and constantly changing. Primary Health Care Services may also utilise locum doctors and nursing staff from the Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) to assist when required. Recruitment efforts through a range of publications and fora continue as required in order to fill vacant positions.

- 3. In May a Barkly Regional Council worker was picking up rubbish behind the Elliot Health Clinic when they were pierced by a discarded needle. That Council worker had to wait eight weeks for test results on possible infection. And the rubbish bag the Council worker picked up was full of several needles, including one which appeared to have blood in it as well as prescription medicine boxes with names of patients fully visible. What has been the result of the investigation into the incident?**

Central Australia Health Service investigated the incident and examination of photos supplied as evidence showed no sharps, a small

amount of clinical waste (blood filled tube, syringe with blood) and general waste.

Following this alleged incident, the Central Australia Health Service-wide Medical Waste Management Guideline, based on best practice principles, was distributed to all remote Primary Health Centres. Management reinforced correct waste and sharps disposal to all staff at the clinic. In addition, waste management policies, procedures and practices are under review to strengthen and ensure compliance with legislation and standards. There is also a review into the Related Medicine Management Guidelines to promote and maintain client confidentiality relating to pharmaceutical paper waste management.

4. What training is given to health clinic staff about the appropriate disposal of sharps and other sensitive medical materials?

Correct disposal procedures is part of core training for all staff. Current procedures and practices include sharps clinical waste being disposed of into sharps containers, which is sealed and transported out of the community for incineration. Pharmaceutical waste is disposed of into Return of Unwanted Medicine Bins located in the remote Primary Health Centre drug storage room, and transported for disposal to Tennant Creek pharmacy.