

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Ms J Carney

to Minister for Health

Dental Health Services

- 1. How is the lack of public dentists in the Territory affecting the Government's ability to deliver service in the area of oral health?**

Oral Health Services NT has achieved positive results in the recruitment and retention of dentists through an active recruitment campaign and new competitive salary rates. The number of Dentists has increased over the past six months to almost full staffing. Two previous part-time staff have elected to take up full-time positions. Some positions are filled with temporary staff. Oral Health Services NT continues to actively promote and advertise positions to attract long-term staff. There have been a number of recent resignations and this will have an immediate impact on activity levels and waiting times. These positions, as well as other positions filled by temporary staff, are currently being advertised nationally and in New Zealand.

Oral Health Services NT has had an increase in activity over the past 12 months, which is directly linked to the increase in dentists employed.

- 2. How many dentists are currently operating at the Darwin and Alice Springs Dental Clinics and does this meet the full needs of the clinics?**

There are 10 dentist positions based in Darwin. All these positions have dentist against them in either a permanent, part-time, casual or private contract basis.

All five dentist positions in Alice Springs are currently filled by permanent and temporary staff.

There has been a reduction in waiting times at both Darwin and Alice Springs clinics.

- 3. Detail the number of full time public dentists operating in Territory centres other than Darwin and Alice Springs Dental Clinics.**

Gove. There is one full-time position for Gove. Public dental services are contracted to the private dental practice based in Gove. The public dental services provided in this region are equal to .9 of a full-time position.

Katherine. There is one full-time position based in Katherine. This position services Katherine and surrounding remote communities that are not part of the Katherine West Health Board.

The permanent public dentist based in Katherine resigned in July 2005. The position has been filled with a locum dentist to the end of November 2005. A national recruitment campaign is underway to recruit a long-term dentist to this position.

Tennant Creek. In the past, public dental services have been contracted to the private dentist service in Tennant Creek. The private dentist left in January 2005. National advertising to attract another private dentist to Tennant Creek has not been successful to date. Department of Health and Community Services staff from Alice Springs currently provide a visiting service. The dentist employed by Anyinginyi Congress in Tennant Creek provides emergency services.

4. Did the Government undertake any recruitment campaigns amongst graduates and experienced dentists in 2004-05? If so, what was the outcome and how many dentists were recruited?

A targeted recruitment campaign was devised to encourage dentists to come and work in the Northern Territory in 2004.

- A 'Road Show' to every Australian Dental School in 2004 attracted expressions of interest from final year students who are interested in working in both the Top End and in Central Australia.
- Two senior staff attended the Westmead Centre for Oral Health Careers Fair in August 2005 to promote the NT service. Planning is underway to ensure that promotion occurs at all relevant dental school events.
- A specially created website for recruiting dentists to the NT is active and receiving hits. The site address is www.dentistry.nt.gov.au
- Final year dental students from Western Australia and Victoria are coming to the Territory for work experience. Evidence shows that a positive student work experience can lead to recruitment on graduation.

These initiatives have had some success:

- A dentist from the UK commenced work in Alice Springs in February 2005 for 12 months.
- A dentist from the USA commenced work in Alice Springs in July 2005 for three months.
- An Overseas Trained Dentist, who passed the final Australian Dental Council Exam in June 2005, has commenced at Darwin Dental Clinic in a permanent position.

5. Who is providing the Children's dental service for 2005/2006 and how many of the positions are filled?

Top End

- Dental Therapist teams comprising a dental therapist and a dental assistant deliver dental services to infants, pre-school and primary school students across the Top End.
- These services are delivered from school based dental clinics, mobile van/trucks and community dental clinic.
- Children requiring treatment outside of the scope of practice of the dental therapist are referred to a dentist.
- There are 15 dental therapist positions in the Top End and all are currently filled.

Central Australia

- Dental Therapist teams deliver dental services to infants, pre-school and primary school students in Alice Springs and some rural communities.
- Dentists deliver these services in rural and remote communities in Central Australia.
- These services are delivered from school based dental clinics, mobile van/trucks and community dental clinics.

- There are two dental therapist positions based in Central Australia and both of these positions are filled.

6. How does this compare to 2003/04?

An additional Dental Therapist team, based in Nhulunbuy, has been funded from 2005/06.

7. Please detail how many dental therapists are employed by the Department of Health by town centre.

- Darwin 11
- Gove 2
- Katherine 2
- Alice Springs 2

8. Are all the Territory dental therapist positions filled?

Yes

9. Are all of the Territory's technician support positions filled?

All positions in the technical stream are filled.

10. Are all of the Oral Health Service Administrative support positions currently filled?

All positions in the administration stream are filled.

11. What are the Darwin and Palmerston clinics' waiting time for general treatment?

- Darwin Dental Clinic: September 05: 20.8 months (34 months in January 05)
- Palmerston Dental Clinic: September 05: 25.7 months (34 months in January 05)

12. In Katherine, Alice Springs, Gove and Tennant Creek what is the waiting time for general treatment?

- Katherine Dental Clinic 6 months (Nil in January 05)
- Alice Springs Dental Clinic 14.5 months (20 months in January 05)
- Tennant Creek Dental Clinic No waiting list (4 – 6 months in January 05)
- Gove Dental Clinic No waiting time (Nil in January 05)

13. Are private dentists used to help reduce these waiting times? If so, what is the hourly rate they are paid at?

The private dental practice in Gove is contracted to provide public dental services. There is no waiting time for public dental treatment in Gove. The contract rate is confidential.

A private dentist is contracted to provide general dental services from Darwin Dental Clinic. This service treats clients from the general waiting list. The contract rate is confidential.

The Night and Day Dental Clinic in Casuarina and Dr Mario Carusi in Katherine provides emergency after hours treatment for public dental clients. These services do not impact on the general waiting lists. The contract rate is confidential.

The Smith Street Dental Surgery is contracted to supply dental services to Port Keats. The contract rate is confidential.

14. What does the practice which actually provides you with the private dental sessions receive by way of remuneration?

This information is contained in the confidential agreements.