

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

7th Assembly

30/03/1995

37. Palliative Care and Radiotherapy Services

Mr. EDE to MINISTER for HEALTH SERVICES

QUESTION

On 28 February 1995, Dr John Zalberg, Director of Medical Oncology and Palliative Care, Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, Victoria, was quoted in The Age as follows: "the Northern Territory has no medical oncologist, very limited radiotherapy services, not a single palliative care specialist, an inadequately resourced domiciliary palliative care programme and not a single hospice."

1. In the light of Dr Zalberg's claim, does the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services have the services of a medical oncologist:
 - (a) if so, under what arrangement; and
 - (b) if not, why not.
2. Are radiotherapy services available within the Northern Territory; if so, what services are available.
3. Does the Northern Territory have a palliative care specialist:
 - (a) if so, under what arrangements; and
 - (b) if not, why not.
4. What resources are committed to palliative care, by community care district.
5. Does the Northern Territory Government intend to provide a hospice; if so:
 - (a) how will this be done; and
 - (b) when will it be completed.
6. Did Alice Springs Department of Health and Community Services personnel place a request for a position of a palliative care nurse specialist to be based in that centre several months ago; if so:
 - (a) why has this not been put in place; and
 - (b) will this position be provided.

ANSWER

Answered on 15/08/95

1. Royal Darwin Hospital has a specialist oncologist visit for 1 week every 4 months. Alice Springs Hospital receives regular quarterly visits from two oncologists from Adelaide. These visits are funded by the Patients Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS).
2. Royal Darwin Hospital has a visiting radiotherapist from Adelaide to review patients. There are, however, no radiotherapy facilities in Darwin as the expense of the equipment is not justified with the small Territory population. Alice Springs Hospital does not provide radiotherapy services. Central Australians requiring radiotherapy are referred to Adelaide for this service, as are the majority of Top End residents. This is funded by PATS.
3. In March 1995 a part-time medical officer commenced work with the Palliative Care Resource Team. Initially, the doctor will have responsibility for Darwin Urban clients and in 6 months time he will begin resourcing the other areas of the Northern Territory.
4. In Darwin, 2 registered nurses provide specialist advice to the Community Care nurses who provide the primary service to patients requiring palliative care. In Alice Springs and the rural areas, it is the hospital and community nursing staff who provide the care to clients. They can contact the designated Palliative Care Team in Darwin should they require assistance in the management of the patient's care.
5. Currently the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services is reviewing the Departmental palliative care services and an options paper, to enable the optimum delivery of palliative care services to Territorians, has been developed for the Minister's consideration.
6. Alice Springs Urban Health District identified the need for a Palliative Care Nurse Specialist and sought funding from the Home and Community Care Program as well as from the Department of Health and Community Services. This is a new initiative and a decision on the applications have not yet been given. The review of palliative care services will also look into the provision of palliative care staffing in Central Australia.