

Question on Notice
No. 45
Asked on 7 February 2007

MRS SULLIVAN asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)-

QUESTION:

How will the new nurse practitioner program launched recently at the Caboolture Hospital benefit the health system?

ANSWER:

Redcliffe Hospital's Emergency Department has successfully implemented the nurse practitioner role and Caboolture is preparing to implement the role in the coming months. Nurse practitioner services at Redcliffe are now available 10 hours per day, 7 days per week and since implementing nurse practitioners at Redcliffe, patient flow through the Emergency Department has improved significantly. Waiting times for category 4 cases have reduced by 49% and category 5 by 39%. Lengths of stay for patients seen by the nurse practitioner have decreased by 53% in category 4 and 67% in category 5 presentations.

Performance indicators and feedback to date from both patients and clinicians is very positive, indicating a sustainable model that makes a significant contribution to alleviating access block in acute facilities.

Nurse practitioners are a vital component of the workforce we need to meet the increased healthcare burden created by such factors as: an ageing population, declining workforce participation rates, increased chronic disease etc.

Nurse practitioners are valuable members of collaborative health teams, working alongside other health professionals to ensure patients receive the best care available. Nurse practitioners tend to see the more straight-forward cases, referring complex cases to their medical colleagues. In the Emergency Department the nurse practitioner will see a small proportion of category 3 patients and a larger proportion of category 4 and category 5 patients.

The decision as to who sees and treats patients must be based on the knowledge, competence and skill of the person rather than on the professional group they belong to. Nurse practitioners are highly experienced, Masters degree educated health professionals. They are able to examine patients; order the necessary tests to aid diagnosis; and use their knowledge and expertise to determine the best therapy or treatment, including prescribing of medications if needed.