

Question on Notice
No. 557
Asked on 17 April 2008

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

QUESTION:

In relation to the recruitment of an oncologist to provide services to the Gladstone Electorate from the Gladstone Base Hospital—

- (1) What advertising has been done to attract applicants?
- (2) What progress has been made to urgently fill this vacancy?

ANSWER:

Since 1997 oncology patients living in and around Gladstone have been able to access the services of a visiting private oncologist at a local clinic. These clinics have been conducted as a bulk billing private clinic at the Mater Hospital but have not been able to continue since the end of March due to the unavailability of the private Oncologist.

Since the 2001-2002 financial year, Gladstone Hospital has received recurrent State Government funding to assist with the support of this clinic by paying for the airfares, accommodation, and other expenses for the visiting private oncologist.

When Cancer Services Central Area Health Service (CAHS) became aware that the Medical Oncologist was to cease visiting Gladstone, they met with the Medical Oncologist, the Director from the Mater Hospital and the Medical Oncology staff from the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. The staff from the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital provide the bulk of the visiting outreach services to CAHS.

Cancer Services CAHS is still attempting to recruit a medical oncologist who is in a position to visit Gladstone to provide consulting services. There is a critical shortage of medical oncologists in Queensland both in the public and the private sector, as there is throughout the rest of Australia, and it's a shortage that is being experienced worldwide.

Medical Oncologists from CAHS who currently visit Rockhampton have agreed to see the public patients from Gladstone. At all times patient safety and the safety of the service provided are overriding factors. Consultations will take place in Rockhampton however as much chemotherapy as is safe will be delivered under their supervision in Gladstone. Cancer Service CAHS will continue to deliver appropriate chemotherapy for patients in Gladstone. This will require medical support in both Gladstone as well as Rockhampton and will require the medical oncologists in Brisbane being available and on call 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

At all times the safety of patients and the sustainability of the service is of the utmost importance. The safest way at present to provide appropriate medical oncology services in Gladstone is as part of the Cancer Care Network in CAHS, seeing the medical oncologist in Rockhampton or Brisbane and having appropriate chemotherapy under remote supervision by the medical oncologists in Brisbane with local medical support in Rockhampton and Gladstone. Patients will still need to travel for more complex chemotherapy and this has always been and is likely to continue to be the safest and most appropriate management.