

Question on Notice

No. 1498

Asked on 16 November 2023

MR S KNUTH ASKED MINISTER FOR HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND AMBULANCE SERVICES AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN (HON S FENTIMAN)—

QUESTION

With reference to Specialist O&G/Maternal Fetal Medicine staff—

Will the Minister (a) confirm that Queensland Health are advertising for Specialist O&G/Maternal Fetal Medicine staff at \$3,700 a day for a 'Northern Hospital', (b) advise how much Queensland Health has spent on locum obstetricians and locum GP obstetricians to staff Queensland Health Hospitals this calendar year to date and (c) explain if casual doctors are not employed by Queensland Health and costly locums are hired instead?

ANSWER

I am advised that that Hospital and Health Services in North Queensland have advertised on occasions for Obstetrics and Maternal Fetal Medicine Staff Specialists as locums in exceptional circumstances where they have not been able to fill existing vacancies with either permanent, temporary or casual staff.

As per the HR B45 Policy, Queensland Health is to pay a daily rate for all locum engagements. This rate is comprised of a base rate plus additional loadings based on the role description, the location of the engagement and the qualifications and experience of the locum medical officer. Where temporary vacancies cannot be filled by current staff, Queensland Health will approach locum agencies to fill these vacancies on a short-term basis. The rates would normally be below \$3,700 per day. Advertised rates vary depending on local market conditions and include GST, recall, on call and agency fees.

Special circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis and any exemption to the terms stipulated in the HR B45 Policy requires Director-General approval.

I am advised that many regional hospitals and health facilities find it difficult to recruit and retain critical medical staff including doctors, nurses, and midwives.

Locums can be engaged utilising a Preferred Supplier Panel (PSP). PSP111539 *Clinical Contingent Workforce* assists regional and rural hospitals obtain the medical staff they need while non-permanent recruitment activities are underway.

Queensland Health has spent approximately \$3.43 million (including travel and accommodation) on obstetrics and gynaecology services (using PSP111539) for the 2023 calendar year (as at 30 October 2023).

I am advised that Queensland Health does employ casual doctors across a range of specialty areas and where available would normally be engaged before locums. Senior Medical Officers terms and conditions of employment are governed by the Medical Officers (Queensland Health) Certified Agreement (No 6) 2022 (MOCA6) and the Medical Officers (Queensland Health) Award 2015 (the Award). Both MOCA6 and the Award confirm that medical officers can be appointed permanently or temporary, and can be engaged on a part time, casual or full time basis.

Locum Arrangements and Conditions HR Policy B45 prohibits employees from being engaged as locums. Whilst that policy position is currently under review, I can advise that, for the purposes of locum engagement, casual employees are able to be engaged by Hospital and Health Services as locums.

I also reiterate the position of the Queensland Government Employment Security policy. The Queensland Government is committed to maximising permanent employment where possible. Fixed term temporary forms of employment should only be utilised where permanent employment is not viable or appropriate. Casual employment should only be utilised where permanent and fixed term temporary employment options have been considered and are not viable or appropriate. Labour hire engagements should only be used in limited circumstances where direct employment is not viable or appropriate and is the least preferred option.

On occasion, due to emergent issues or the unavailability of staff, the use of locums is necessary to ensure we continue the excellent health care that the public of Queensland is entitled to.