

Question on Notice

No. 959

Asked on 23 August 2023

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

QUESTION

With reference to the 6,000 Australians who die each year from conditions that might be cured by a transplant, the ‘in principle’ support by the former Health Minister for the roll out of cheek swab testing to expand the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR), the \$1m provided to Strength to Give and Lifeblood for this purpose and further necessary funding requiring approval by State and Federal Health Ministers—Will the Minister advise (a) whether the Minister has read the Haemopoietic Progenitor Cell Sector Clinical Advisory Group report regarding the further expansion of the ABMDR and (b) what actions the Minister will take to progress this expansion?

ANSWER

I would like to thank the member for his question and for meeting with me in September to discuss this matter.

It is important to clarify from the outset that matched donors are typically found for Queenslanders in need of a stem cell transplant, and that it is quite rare for a patient to not be matched to a donor in a timely manner. While it is sadly true that close to 6,000 Australians lose their life to blood cancers and related blood disorders every year, unfortunately, stem cell transplantation is not always a cure, or even a treatment option for some patients with these conditions.

As the Member is aware, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care is leading the reform of the national stem cell sector through the National Haemopoietic Progenitor Cell, or HPC, Framework. Queensland is actively contributing to this process through participation on the Jurisdictional HPC Committee, which is the body tasked with overseeing this critical work.

Work is underway to progress a number of key objectives of the Framework related to expanded recruitment to the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry, including to implement increased buccal-swab recruitment sample testing alongside blood-based testing. It is important however that this work proceed in line with Australian regulatory requirements and in consideration of clinical need.

Focus is also being given to the development of tailored recruitment strategies targeting ideal donors, with particular attention to population groups whose ethnicity is less represented on the Registry, such as our First Nations peoples. As the Member would appreciate, given Australia’s ethnically diverse population, it is important that we focus efforts not just on increasing the number of donors registered, but also on recruiting the right mix of donors to meet patient need and increase the chances of

Australian patients finding a donor here within our own borders. Australia has, and always will, contribute to and call upon a global network of stem cell donor registries to find the best donor for the patient in need. The work currently being undertaken within this reform will increase Australian donor representation and decrease our demand on international registries.

While this broad reform work is underway, Health Ministers have also agreed to commit \$1 million in funding to progress an initial ideal donor recruitment drive, via both buccal swab and blood-based sampling. The Commonwealth Government is in final stage negotiations with suppliers for this body of work and I hope to see these recruitment drives commence in the immediate future.

Regarding the Report of the Clinical Advisory Group, I am aware that the Group was convened by the Commonwealth Government to advise the Jurisdictional HPC Committee on implementation of the National HPC Sector Framework, and that the Clinical Advisory Group has submitted its initial recommendations to the Committee for consideration. I have been advised that the Jurisdictional HPC Committee is scheduled to meet in October to discuss the recommendations of the Clinical Advisory Group, as part of its considerations in implementing the broader reform activities of the National Framework and will provide an update to the Health Ministers Meeting later this year.

Until the Report has been considered by Governments, I am unable to discuss the recommendations made by the Clinical Advisory Group further. However, I assure the Member that I remain committed to working with the Commonwealth, jurisdictions and key stakeholders to implement the strategic objectives of the National HPC Framework, including those related to the expansion of recruitment to the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry.

As always, I ask that all Queenslanders consider contacting the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood to make an appointment to donate blood and register to join the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry. Queenslanders can find out more by visiting the Registry at <https://strengthtogive.org.au/>.