

Question – 28.07.2011
COUNTRY HOSPITALS

Mr BROCK (Frome) (14:37): My question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister clarify media claims that 17 government hospitals will be closing or are being considered for closure in regional South Australia? In the local media in my region, *The Flinders News*, comments were made by the shadow minister for health on 18 May 2011 at a forum in Clare that the government was looking at closing 17 hospitals in regional South Australia and another 20 hospitals were recommended to be closed or downgraded.

The Hon. A. Koutsantonis interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order, minister for trade!

Mr BROCK: This has caused, and is still causing, grave concerns to the people who are living in regional South Australia.

The Hon. J.D. HILL (Kurna—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister for the Southern Suburbs, Minister Assisting the Premier in the Arts) (14:38): I thank the member for Frome for his question. I am glad he has given me an opportunity to respond to these outrageous, irresponsible and scaremongering claims by the very desperate—increasingly desperate—shadow minister for health, the member for Morphett. I am sorry he is not here today so I could say it straight to his face. He has made these claims on a number of occasions around country South Australia. He goes to a Liberal Party branch meeting, revs up the troops by making these outrageous claims—

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Because they are reported in the local media.

Mr Pederick interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order, the member for Hammond!

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I think it was in the Riverland.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on my left and members on my right, behave, and listen to the minister. This is an important issue for me, being a country member.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Thank you. The reason I know this is because the local newspaper, I think from memory in the Riverland, included photographs of nice Liberal members with the member for Morphett attending a Liberal Party branch dinner, and it was reported in the press. So I know he has been going around the country saying these things. He has repeated them.

I have said categorically this is untrue. The government will not close any Country Health SA hospitals. We will not close any of our hospitals, yet despite these claims he continues to repeat the false claims, because he knows it will upset and scare people. Obviously that is what the member for Frome has been getting. But I give you an absolute guarantee that all Country Health SA hospitals will stay open.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. J.D. HILL: In fact, the only party that wants to close country hospitals is the Liberal Party.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The member for Schubert wants to close two country hospitals. He wants to close two country hospitals. Admittedly he wants to build a new and better hospital, but still, he wants to close two country hospitals.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Venning: That's not fair!

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Oh, I see; the member for Morphett can go round country South Australia and claim we are going to close 17 hospitals. That's fine. I make a true claim that the member for Schubert is going to close two hospitals, which he said he would do, and he wants to build a new one on a third site. I have given all the detail about what he wants to do, but that's not fair! Okay, well I will not quote what the member for Schubert says again. It's obviously not fair.

We know, Madam Speaker, that when they were in office last time the Liberal government closed 466 beds, or about 20 per cent of all beds in country South Australia. That is the equivalent of closing down a hospital as big as the Flinders Medical Centre. So they cannot be trusted. I say to the member for Frome: tell your constituents to look at the track record of the Liberal Party in government before you decide what they would do. Under this government, Madam Speaker, country health spending—

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. J.D. HILL: —has increased significantly, as you would know, to \$719.8 million for 2011-12, which is \$339.5 million, or 89.3 per cent, more than the last year of the former government. We have also doubled the number of country doctors and employed an additional 717 nurses and midwives, or 26 per cent more, across country South Australia since 2002.

More resources, of course, mean more services and that means more elective surgery, more renal dialysis and more chemotherapy coming. More treatment in country hospitals means less travel for people. In this year's state budget we allocated \$5.7 million towards the \$12.5 million Port Pirie GP Plus Health Care Centre. That will offer integrated healthcare services for the Port Pirie community.

Experience does show that primary health care properly managed will help people with chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma, and makes it possible for patients to avoid emergency departments.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on my left will be quiet. Sit there and be quiet!

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Importantly, this facility will increase recruitment and retention of skilled staff in Port Pirie. Under initial funding, the adjacent YMCA site has been bought for a purpose-built, 1,600 square metre facility, and, in addition, repairs will be made to the existing community health building, which will be used predominantly as office accommodation.

This new facility is expected to include 22 consultation rooms, therapy zone and group rooms. Through this efficient design we will see, for example, children's services relocated to the same area as women's health, and there will be a youth-specific area as well. There will also be better coordination of general practitioners, private allied health practitioners and agencies such as Child Adolescent Mental Health Service, Child and Youth Health, and Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia. There will be a central health information portal, videoconferencing with specialist clinicians and extended hours provision.

A project brief has been developed by the Department of Health and Country Health SA. Three architectural firms and four cost planners have submitted bids as part of a select tender process, which closed on 1 July. The tenders are being evaluated currently. The major development is just one part of our plans to improve facilities and services in country SA, and we are making a range of advances all over the state, including in your own electorate, Madam Speaker. I am happy to provide more information if required.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, be quiet. The member for Goyder.