

Question

PORT PIRIE REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICE 14.09.2011

Mr BROCK (Frome) (14:26): My question is to the Minister for Health. I ask the Minister for Health: what assurances can he give to the women of Port Pirie and the region, and the wider community, in terms of radiology services, breast cancer screening, dialysis, diagnostics and treatment through the Port Pirie Regional Health Service?

Since June last year, my office has received steady streams of representations from both constituents and the healthcare providers in our communities regarding the non-availability of these services. They have all raised concerns regarding equity and access to and provision of radiology services at the Port Pirie Regional Health Service. These services have been unavailable for some months now and people requiring these services have had to travel to different locations.

In doing this, I would like to thank the minister for arranging recent meetings with the Department of Health and Country Health SA—I have had personal briefings on this—but now I would like the minister to update the house and the people of Port Pirie as to the progress of these services.

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) (14:27): I thank the member for Frome for this question. I acknowledge his very strong advocacy for his community and particularly for health services in his community in regional South Australia. BreastScreen SA and Country Health SA are working to improve the provision of screening and diagnostic mammography services and cancer treatment for local communities to make sure that women right across country South Australia have the best access to these vital services in a very safe and effective manner.

One of the two mobile screening units for BreastScreen SA (the new units I launched a year or so ago which now have digital screening services) is currently based at Port Pirie, as the member probably knows, where BreastScreen SA staff are spending 52 working days offering free breast cancer screening. It is important to note that a doctor's referral is not required, and the service estimates that it will screen 2,285 asymptomatic women during this visit until 20 September.

For women aged between 50 and 69 who have no breast symptoms following a self-examination, a screening mammogram through BreastScreen SA every two years can reduce their chances of dying from breast cancer. Early detection of the disease leads to vastly improved outcomes and survival rates: it is one of the great success stories of modern health, in fact. Port Pirie is one of 27 rural and remote locations which will get a visit from this colourful semitrailer every two years, which is the recommended screening interval.

I can also announce today that Country Health SA has negotiated a three-year extension of the contract with I-MED which will offer greater availability of radiology and the reintroduction of diagnostic mammography services which were discontinued by the private provider of radiology services (that is, I-MED) in September 2008—which was regrettable, obviously.

There is a fundamental difference between breast cancer screening and diagnostic mammography. Symptomatic women of any age need a far more detailed diagnostic mammogram accompanied by a clinical breast exam and breast ultrasound. I-MED has sourced a new mammography machine and this, I am told, was installed last week and the first procedure is planned for, I think, either yesterday or today.

The new contract extension will also resolve the issues of the radiologist and equipment availability in Port Pirie. A new service agreement will deliver a high standard of care to local residents, who will not need to be referred from Port Pirie to Port Augusta or Adelaide or

somewhere else. In addition, Country Health SA is also currently negotiating to replace additional equipment including the X-ray and ultrasound machines at the Port Pirie Regional Health Service as part of the statewide medical imaging review.

As part of the state government's country health improvements, I have asked for more services to be delivered in rural, regional and remote areas, and by that I mean more elective surgery, more renal dialysis—and that is expanding right across the country, sadly, as the demand for such services increases—and also, importantly, chemotherapy, and we are targeting a range of centres to increase chemotherapy services.

More treatment in country hospitals, of course, means fewer people have to come to the city, and that is obviously less disruptive as well as being better for the overall management of our systems. At Port Pirie Regional Health Service, chemotherapy services are provided for breast cancer, and in fact the Port Pirie Regional Health Service is the leader in the area of chemotherapy, as I know the member understands.

The number of clients presenting for various chemotherapy treatments has climbed from 80 10 years ago to 679 in the last financial year. In 2006, a full-time chemotherapy nurse was employed to meet that increased demand. Port Pirie Regional Health Service has a visiting oncologist from the Royal Adelaide Hospital who consults monthly, allowing women with breast cancer to be reviewed closer to home, thereby reducing the stress of travel.

Port Pirie Regional Health Service has also developed a PICC insertion service which is used in some breast cancer treatments, and that has been in place since 2010. That allows another service to be provided closer to home. This year's state budget allocated \$5.7 million towards the \$12.5 million Port Pirie GP Plus Health Care Centre, and that will offer integrated healthcare services for the Port Pirie community.

The GP Plus Health Care Centre will also offer more services to help patients manage chronic conditions, including cancer, but will have a focus as well on prevention and early diagnosis. In fact, there is provision in the design of the GP Plus Health Care Centre for the BreastScreen mobile digital units to be parked adjacent to the centre and integrated into it.

All in all, we have an example of a connected healthcare system where women have access to early detection, diagnosis and cancer care closer to home. I would like through the local member to assure the Port Pirie community that this government is committed to improving the health of country residents, and we will continue our efforts to provide as many services as possible at a local level.