



## House of Assembly

Wednesday 27 July 2011

### QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

#### PUBLIC DENTAL SERVICES

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (14:39): My question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister advise the house of what improvements have been made to public dental services in the northern suburbs of Adelaide?

The Hon. J.D. HILL (Kaurana – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister for the Southern Suburbs, Minister Assisting the Premier in the Arts) (14:39): I am delighted to provide the member and the house with information about improvements to dental health services in the northern suburbs.

On 25 October of last year, a 20-chair South Australian dental service clinic in the new Elizabeth GP Plus health care centre began operation. This has led to a dramatic reduction in waiting times for public dental patients across the northern suburbs of Adelaide. In the time since it has been open, I am advised that more than 4,000 people have availed themselves of the service and, collectively, they have

had 7,000 dental visits at the GP Plus dental health clinic in that time.

As a result, I am further advised, waiting times for public dental patients in the Elizabeth area have been reduced from 11 months in July last year to 5½ months in June this year. So, across 12 months, they have reduced by half. To put this reduction in context, the average state waiting time for public dental health services when we came to government was 48 months. So in the Elizabeth area, from 48 months on average across the state to 5½ months in June this year.

The opening of the Elizabeth GP Plus clinic has not only allowed more people to receive their treatment closer to home but it has also taken pressure off some of the older and smaller public dental clinics in that area. As a result, public dental waiting lists at other clinics in the northern metropolitan area have also reduced in the past year. For example, the waiting time for the Salisbury and Gawler clinics – which I am sure will be of great interest to the member for Light – have reduced from 21 months in July 2010 to 14 months in June this year.

The Elizabeth GP Plus clinic has also played an important part in attracting dental staff to work in the area. I think that is one of the most important parts of this new development. It is a brand-new facility with excellent equipment and great facilities for staff. The service has told me that it has been very easy to get dentists and dental students to work in that area. Already this year, two new dental graduates have joined the SA Dental Service to work in an area which, in the past, has been very difficult to recruit to.

The improvements to dental services in the northern suburbs are not just limited to the Elizabeth GP Plus centre. I am also pleased to report that the SA Dental Service is about to commence general anaesthetic services locally, at the Gawler Hospital, for young children with severe dental disease. Once again, I am sure the member for Light will be pleased by this announcement. Previously, this care has only been available at the Women's and Children's Hospital. Over the next few months, around 300 young children from the northern suburbs will benefit from this initiative.

The opening of more GP Plus and GP Super clinics in other areas is expected to extend the improvement in public dental services beyond the northern suburbs. Recently, Marion GP Plus was opened; that has got 24 dental chairs. The Noarlunga GP Plus Super Clinic will have 24. The Modbury GP Plus Super Clinic will have 14 chairs. Both of those services will open early next year.

The improvements in dental services are not just limited to the metropolitan area. With the commonwealth's assistance, we have been able to expand, under the \$26.7 million redevelopment at Mount Gambier hospital, increasing the number of chairs from six to 10. We have a \$39 million redevelopment at Port Lincoln, which will include a seven-chair public dental service. A further \$3.3 million is about to be invested in five new chairs at Wallaroo and that clinic will improve access to care of people.

So right across South Australia, we have made big investments in dental care. We know this is an important issue for the community, for public patients to get good access to quick service, and we have

been able to reduce the waiting times quite dramatically. With the further redevelopments and changes at the federal level, we hope to bring the waiting time down to below 12 months.