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## **Difficulties for Patients in Finding a New Local GP**

Dr Mike Nahan, the Member for Riverton said the recent closure of the Murdoch Medical Centre had highlighted the difficulties patients experienced in finding a new General Practitioner.

"Several elderly constituents contacted me about the difficulties they were experiencing difficulties in not only finding a new GP but also in getting their medical records transferred to their new doctor," said Dr Nahan.

"They were very disappointed that they received little or no warning that the practice was closing. However, in looking into this issue on their behalf, it seems there is no statutory obligation for medical practices to provide patients with advice about an impending closure."

Dr Nahan said he had contacted the Minister for Health about these issues who had advised that the management of medical records by General Practitioners (GPs) is the responsibility of each GP but it is carried out within a general policy framework set out by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) in its *"Privacy Resource Handbook for All Medical Practitioners in the Private Sector"*.

"Original patient records remain the property of the medical practice but patients are definitely entitled to have a copy of their records sent to another practice," said Dr Nahan.

"However, it is up to the individual GPs to determine the fees they charge for that service and according to the AMA's handbook, they can charge patients a 'reasonable' fee to cover administrative costs such as photocopying or reviewing the notes."

Dr Nahan said the Minister for Health is not in a position to exercise any direct influence on the policies and procedures adopted by the AMA and its members in relation to medical records.

"However, it's the Minister's view and mine as well, that there is a case for GPs to waive any fees associated with the transfer of patient medical records to another GP for pensioners and other low income groups," said Dr Nahan.

Dr Nahan said the closure of the Murdoch Medical Centre and the difficulties being experienced by patients in finding another GP is symptomatic of the shortage of doctors that is being experienced not only in WA but across Australia.

"The supply of doctors is predominately a Commonwealth responsibility. The Commonwealth determines the number of medical training places at universities and is responsible for policies affecting the intake of overseas trained doctors," said Dr Nahan.

“Nonetheless, it is pleasing to see that the WA Government has joined with other States to lobby the Commonwealth for action in this area.

“In WA, the number of medical graduates from our universities will increase from 132 in 2008 to 306 in 2015. This year, 218 additional medical undergraduates commenced working in the WA health system.”

In addition, to boost the availability of GP services outside normal working hours, Dr Nahan said the State Government has committed \$8 million over four years to the “Grants to After Hours General Practice” initiative, which was introduced this year.

“The program is part of a wider strategy to ensure that as many people as possible have access to quality general practice services when they need them. Grants are provided to support those general practice services wishing to extend their hours of operation with a particular focus on areas of high need,” said Dr Nahan.

“These initiatives are helping to improve access to GPs although it may take some years to significantly increase the number of doctors working in WA.”

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