

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2010-11, 23 February 2011

Question: E11-019

OUTCOME 3: Access to Medical Services

Topic: POSITRON EMISSION TOMOGRAPHY (PET) SCANNERS

Written Question on Notice

Senator Siewert asked:

- a) Is the Government aware of a recent letter from Royal North Shore Hospital Sydney stating that the Minister received a report from MSAC more than 14 months ago that recommended expansion of MBS funding for lymphoma to allow access at more hospitals with PET scanners, and that patients were being disadvantaged by the delay?
- b) With respect to the Royal North Shore Hospital PET scanner: how much funding did the Government provide for the scanner?
- c) Is the Government aware that the PET scanner is operating well below full capacity?
- d) Would the Government agree that delays in putting additional PET Items for diseases such as lymphoma is causing inefficient use of Commonwealth funds as well as disadvantaging cancer patients?
- e) Does the Government know if other PET scanners it has funded are being used or will be used with greater efficiency?

Answer:

- a) The department has received a letter (dated 18 February 2011) from a staff member from the Royal North Shore Hospital on this subject.
- b) The Government provided NSW Health with \$3.5 million across 2008-09 and 2009-10 for the purchase and installation of a combined PET and computed tomography (CT) scanner at the Royal North Shore Hospital.
- c) In 2010, Royal North Shore Hospital provided 441 Medicare-rebatable PET scans. This is below the average number of Medicare-rebatable PET scans provided across all PET facilities (approx. 1,100). It is possible the PET scanner is also being used to provide PET scans where no Medicare rebate is available. The department does not have access to data regarding non-MBS eligible PET scans.
- d) MBS eligible PET scans for lymphoma are currently available at seven facilities, including two Sydney hospitals. Regardless of MBS eligibility, patients can choose to have lymphoma PET scans at any PET facility. Many of the funded PET machines are in public hospitals and may be being used for public patients. This should not disadvantage cancer patients.

- e) In recent years, the department has provided funding for the purchase and installation of PET scanners at:
- The Royal North Shore Hospital (\$3.5 million in 2008-09 and 2009-10);
  - Westmead Hospital (\$4 million in 2004-05);
  - Newcastle Calvary Mater Hospital (\$3.5 million in 2008-09 and 2009-10);
  - The Royal Hobart Hospital (\$3.5 million in 2009-10);
  - The Geelong Public Hospital (\$500,000 in 2009-10).

In 2010, Westmead Hospital provided 613 Medicare-rebatable PET scans. However, in addition to this, grant funding provided to Westmead Hospital by the department has been used to provide over 1,000 additional PET scans where no Medicare rebate is currently available.

In 2010, the PET scanner at Newcastle Calvary Mater Hospital provided 495 Medicare-rebatable PET scans. The department does not have access to data on PET scans where there is no Medicare benefit.

As the Royal Hobart Hospital's PET scanner is not yet operational, the department cannot ascertain whether it will operate at full capacity.

As the PET scanner at Geelong Public Hospital did not become operational until late 2010, the department is unable to determine whether the PET scanner is operating at full capacity.