



**HOSPITALS, REGIONAL**  
**31 August 2006**

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** My question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister advise the house of the length of the waiting list for joint operations in South Australia's regional hospitals, and indicate what action he is taking to reduce these waiting lists? A Port Lincoln constituent who is on painkillers and in urgent need of knee replacement and hip replacement has been advised that he will have to wait two years for his knee replacement at Whyalla Hospital, followed by an unknown wait for a hip replacement. The patient was told by Whyalla Hospital that only 52 joint operations are budgeted for each year and there are 450 patients on the waiting list.

**The Hon. J.D. HILL (Minister for Health):** I thank the member for the question. It gives me the opportunity to say a number of things. First, just as a brief answer to the previous question by the deputy leader: I am advised that the elective surgery bulletin is still being prepared. It has not reached my office. She made a comment that it takes six weeks usually. I am told that the March bulletin was published in July, so I would expect a similar kind of distance between the time.  
*Ms Chapman interjecting:*

**The Hon. J.D. HILL:** Well, if you knew that was the case, you misled the house when you said it was six weeks. The second point is in relation to waiting lists, and particularly waiting lists in rural South Australia. I point out to the house, and particularly the member for Flinders, that at the moment in South Australia we have a whole range of country hospitals that are run by individual country boards which make decisions about a whole range of things in terms of the way those hospitals operate. I think it is a bit rich for her to come in here and ask me a question about the operation of country health, which I am trying to reform so that we have an integrated system that means we can put more money into operations and health, and less money into bureaucracy. The opposition—the deputy leader—are going all over the countryside bagging what I am trying to do, and yet they have the gall to come in here and ask me why that system is not working. It is not working well. We want to improve it to get better health outcomes for country South Australians. All you want to do is defend a bureaucracy based on our country health.

**The** *Members interjecting:*  
**SPEAKER:** Order!

**Ministerial statement 31/8/06 (see also [media release](#))**

**The Hon. J.D. HILL (Minister for Health):** I seek leave to make another ministerial statement.  
Leave granted.

**The Hon. J.D. HILL:** In question time the member for Flinders asked me about a patient, a constituent of hers, who had seen an orthopaedic surgeon. I can give the house some further information. The patient was referred by his GP to an orthopaedic surgeon in Whyalla for assessment of his need for a knee replacement. He was seen by the orthopaedic surgeon on 28 July this year who assessed him as non-urgent and placed him on the surgeon's waiting list for surgery at Whyalla Hospital. I can inform the house that the state government and the department of health have acted to reduce waiting times on Eyre Peninsula by providing Whyalla Hospital with an extra allocation of \$162 000—that was in March 2006—to undertake more surgery of this type.

Neither the state government nor Whyalla Hospital controls the surgical waiting lists of specialist visiting surgeons. It is a

decision of the examining surgeon to determine the urgency of a particular case based on medical need and, as I pointed out, this was considered by the doctor to be a non-urgent case. If individual patients are suffering increased pain they should contact their general practitioner, who can seek a reassessment of the urgency of their condition or investigate whether transfer to another surgeon's waiting list is a better option.

The establishment of Country Health SA, with its ability to coordinate and plan service delivery across the whole of country South Australia, will enable greater opportunities for work force planning in line with population health needs and provide greater flexibility to ensure that country residents get the best possible health care required.