

## Questions taken on notice during the hearing on 1 May 2008

### Question 1

*Dr Andrew McDonald asked in relation to the requirement in the terms of reference of the Garling Inquiry into the New South Wales health system for the Special Commission to refer individual complainants to the Health Care Complaints Commission: 'How has the Health Care Complaints Commission been assisting the Special Commission? Roughly how many complaints have been received?' (transcript page 3).*

*You undertook to give the Committee a particular figure as to how many complaints had been referred.*

### Response:

As at 30 April 2008, the Commission had received 79 complaints from the Garling Special Commission of Inquiry.

---

### Question 2

*The Hon. David Clarke MLC referred to page 31 of the annual report which states that treatment issues accounted for 86.3 per cent of all issues and investigations of health organisations. He asked: 'Given that these issues would necessarily involve individual medical practitioners and the health care providers, does the Commission undertake any further breakdown or use these figures to investigate individuals?' (transcript page 3).*

*As part of your reply, you stated the Commission was redoing all of the issue categories with a much greater degree of specificity so that it can*

*be clearer and give a breakdown that speaks more accurately to people. The Committee would appreciate receiving further details about that.*

Response:

Enclosed is the current version of the revised complaint issue categories that the Commission has developed following both internal consultation with Commission staff, and external consultation with the Department of Health and the Commission's counterparts in other Australian jurisdictions.

The Commission will again be discussing these categories with its counterparts at a conference later this month – the purpose being to bring as much consistency as possible to the complaint issues used throughout Australia, in order to compare and contrast relevant statistics and trends between and among the various Australian jurisdictions.

Subject to any minor alterations or additions agreed to at the agency conference, the Commission will be using the revised issue categories as from 1 July 2008.

The Commission anticipates that the use of the revised issue categories will assist in better identifying complaint trends generally, in relation to both individual health practitioners and health organisations.

---

Question 3

*The Hon. David Clarke MLC asked in relation to complaints received about hospitals in the past two months: 'How substantial has that increase been?' (transcript page 6).*

*You undertook to give the Committee actual numbers of complaints, noting that the increase was significant.*

Response:

The figures and trends in relation to the number of complaints about health service providers generally, and about public hospitals in particular, are as follows:

**Complaints generally**

In 2006-07, the Commission received a total of 2,722 complaints – an average of about 227 complaints per month.

For the following ten-month period, from July 2007 to April 2008, the Commission received 2,514 complaints – an average of 251 complaints per month.

The last three months of this ten-month period – February, March and April 2008 – have seen a steady increase in the number of complaints received by the Commission.

**Complaints about public hospitals**

In 2006-07, 508 of the 2,722 complaints (18.7%) were about public hospitals.

For the following ten-month period, from July 2007 to April 2008, 603 of the 2,514 complaints (24%) were about public hospitals.

The relatively high and increasing number of complaints about public hospitals in the last three months reflects the fact that the Garling Special Commission of Inquiry is required by its terms of reference to refer any complaints that it receives to the Commission, and has been doing so during that period (see also the Commission’s response to Question 1 above, at page 14).

*Table: Number of complaints received from 1 July 2007 to 30 April 2008  
(calculated by reference to the number of health service providers the subject of complaint)*

	2007						2008				Total
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	
Complaints received about health service providers	237	257	219	278	233	194	215	268	277	336	2514
Complaints received about public hospitals	53	62	44	72	53	38	47	58	70	106	603
% of complaints about public hospitals	22.4%	24.1%	20.1%	25.9%	22.7%	19.6%	21.9%	21.6%	25.3%	31.5%	24.0%

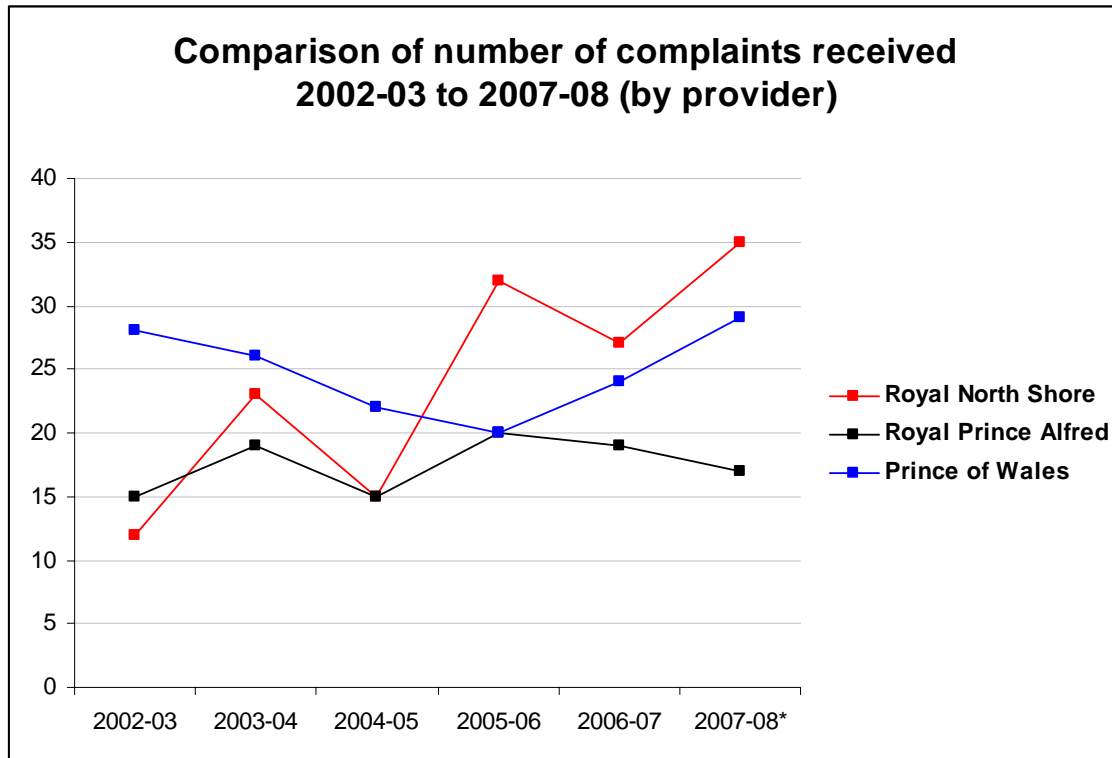
Question 4

*Dr Andrew McDonald asked about the North Shore inquiry and the underreporting of health care complaints. The North Shore inquiry found there was significant underreporting. He asked: ‘Has that inquiry had any impact on the work of the Commission?’ and ‘Now that it has been some months, are you able to take that on notice for us?’ (transcript page 7).*

*You undertook to obtain an analysis of the rate of complaints from the North Shore compared to other big teaching hospitals from the Department of Health.*

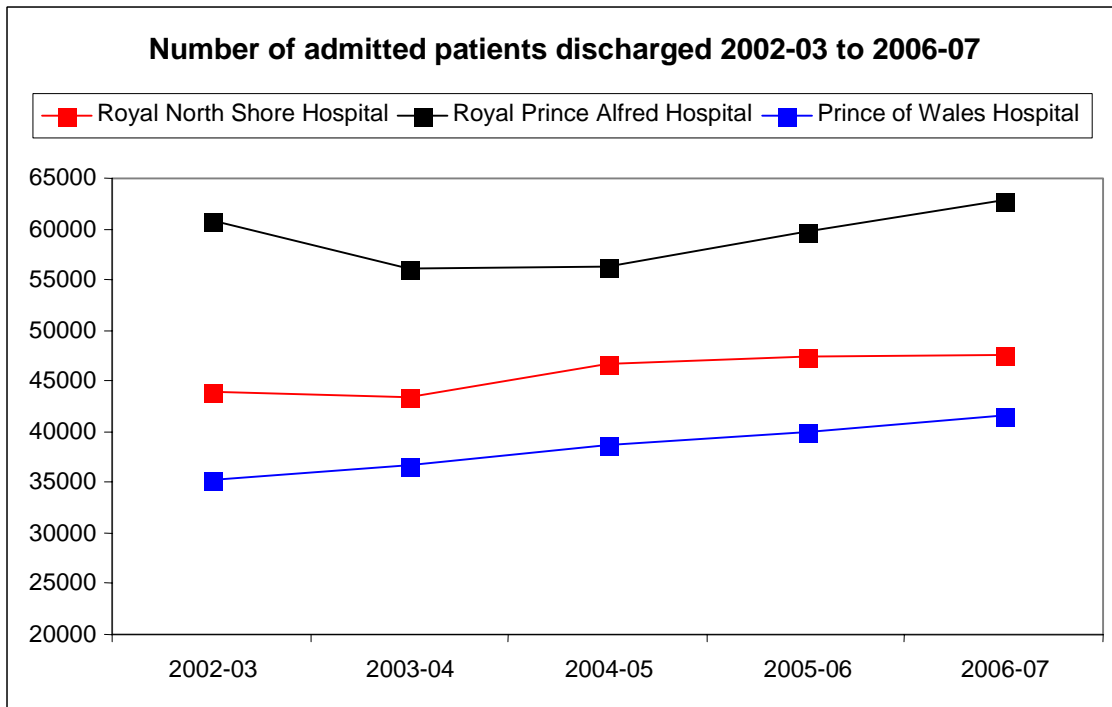
Response:

The following graph shows the actual number of complaints that were received about Royal North Shore Hospital, compared to other comparable hospitals – Royal Prince Alfred and Prince of Wales – over the years from 2002-03 to 2007-08.

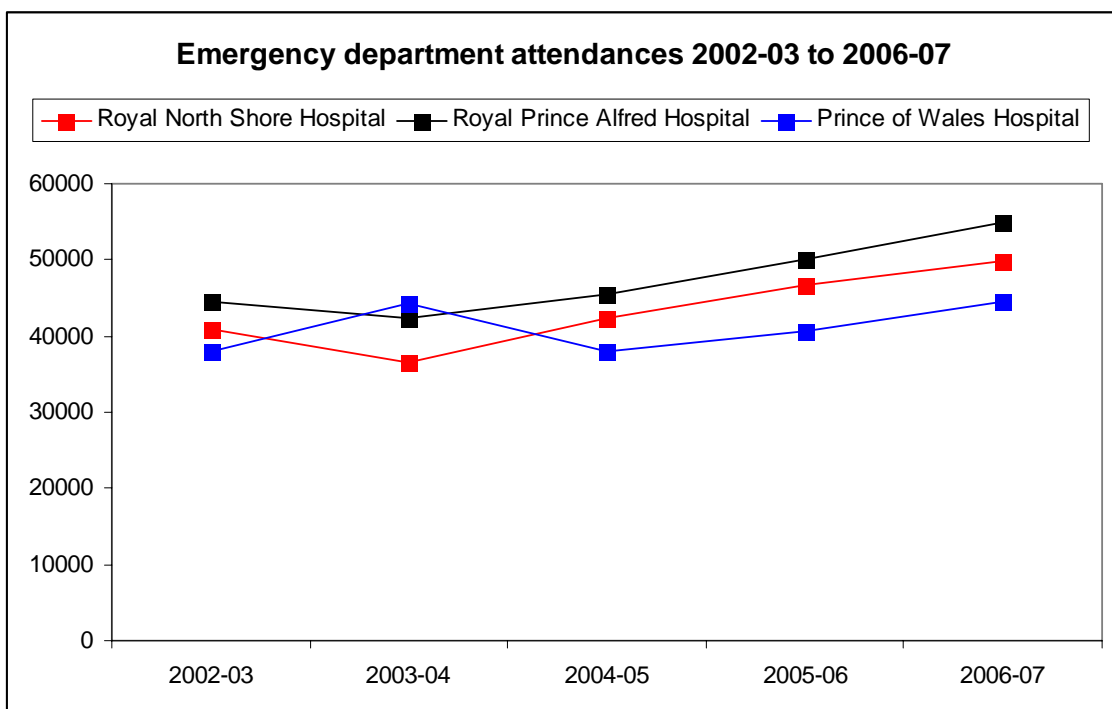


\* Estimate based on data for the ten-month period from July 2007 to April 2008

It is unsafe to draw any conclusions from these numbers in light of the small number of complaints compared to the vast number of admissions and emergency attendances for each of the hospitals, as set out in the graphs on the following page:



Data provided by the Department of Health



Data provided by the Department of Health