



Speech by

Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 5 August 1998

DIALYSIS TREATMENT, ROCKHAMPTON

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (7.12 p.m.): I rise to address the concerns of a relatively small group of people in my electorate who face significant hardships in dealing with their particular illness. I also wish to pay tribute to Mrs Heather Miles and her Kidney Foundation committee for their hard work. We currently have six people travelling at least three times per week from Gladstone to Rockhampton to access a dialysis machine. That number rises and falls depending upon a number of issues.

People in Brisbane often mistakenly believe that Rockhampton and Gladstone are very close—after all, on a map they are only half an inch apart. In reality, it takes between an hour and an hour and a half to travel from Gladstone to Rockhampton. We have no public transport such as there is in south-east Queensland. Given the nature of their illness and treatment recovery time, patients must drive to Rockhampton, undertake preparation and treatment and travel home later in the day. I wrote to the previous Government and to the current Health Minister asking that consideration be given to the placement of a dialysis machine in the Gladstone Hospital. To date, the cost of fully staffing such a facility has stopped the progress of this proposal. After discussions with the Kidney Foundation, I will be approaching the Health Minister for her consideration of a satellite unit in Gladstone manned by Rockhampton staff for the necessary time to service the needs of these special people.

In the interim, I would like to put another issue to the Minister for Health. In fairness to the Minister, I have yet to place this matter in writing as it was only late last week that I met with the representatives of the Kidney Foundation. All referred patients are eligible for travel assistance. Currently the allowance is 10c per kilometre. This may not amount to much but it certainly helps to defray costs. However, with chronic illness, where a return trip to Rockhampton must be made three or four times per week, the 10c may help with fuel but it does nothing for the continued wear and tear on the vehicles. These costs blow out even more for people who live further away from a dialysis machine.

For example, in my area one carer takes his spouse to Rockhampton three times a week—220 kilometres per round trip. The assistance amounts to \$22 per trip or \$66 per week. In a year, that couple travel approximately 34,320 kilometres. That is double or treble the usual annual mileage for many inner-city dwellers. The vehicles must be maintained in good order as the work associated with each treatment is significant. The patient has to be prepared, weighed in, the needles have to be inserted and the patient must be available at the commencement time of each treatment because of the regime that they have to undergo. After the patient has had three to five hours' treatment on the machine, the machine has to be cleaned completely of the presence of blood products. All tubes have to be disposed of and the equipment made ready for the second shift of that day.

Any lack of reliability with vehicles is therefore a significant risk to proper functioning of the program. If a patient and carer are caught on the side of the road, they have to try to contact the hospital so that another person can be brought in. What I propose to the Minister is that for people with a chronic illness, such as renal failure, where repeated and long-term treatment must be maintained, a higher scale of remuneration be given to recognise the extra cost of not only fuel, oil and tyres but also the increased maintenance cost to keep vehicles in good condition. These vehicles cover great distances over a year.

We have one patient in Gladstone who, apart from a relatively short seven-year reprieve after a liver transplant, has been travelling to Rockhampton for treatment for 24 years. People have other illnesses apart from renal failure. People with cancer and other illnesses have to undertake a lot of travelling and a higher scale of remuneration would give them some relief. I commend consideration of this higher level of travel assistance to the Minister on the basis of practicality as well as compassion.
