



Speech by

# Miss FIONA SIMPSON

## MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 9 March 1999

### MINISTER FOR HEALTH

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (11.49 a.m.): This is a can't do Government. We have a Government that will not take action to get rid of a Health Minister who is dangerously out of control. If Government members were not appalled by the Health Minister's performance this morning during question time, they need some medical treatment as well.

There is approximately a \$50m budget blow-out, and we know that, in the seven months since this Government took over, surgery waiting lists around Queensland have nearly doubled in the semi-urgent surgery classification. We know also that, after what this Government did to Toowoomba, it will stop at nothing to look for a scapegoat for its Health Minister and the mistakes that she has been making. The Royal Brisbane Hospital has something like a \$14m budget blow-out; the Prince Charles Hospital has something like a \$1.8m budget blow-out; Caboolture/Redcliffe, \$2m; Nambour, \$2.5m; and the Toowoomba Hospital, \$7m.

What happened at Toowoomba? That hospital was on budget—within budget—when we were in Government, and it was within budget up to the election. But since the change of Government, what has happened? There has been a \$7m blow-out, elective surgery waiting times are going through the roof and the Health Minister's action is to look for a scapegoat. I happen to know that the Queensland Nurses Union is very concerned about what has happened and is having discussions with the Health Department today. I believe that the rest of the staff at that hospital would be quite rightly concerned—very concerned—because unless the Health Minister is going to put more money into that hospital, it will continue to have problems.

Let us have a look at the language used to describe that bloodbath in Toowoomba. This Government called it "an administrative restructure" of the Toowoomba District Health Service. Perhaps it is time for the Premier to have an administrative restructure of his front bench. In this press release, the Government talks about how confident it is that the restructure will bring about a new era of health care. The only way to deal with that problem is to give the hospital more money. Or is the Government proposing to chop jobs? That is why the staff are worried and, quite understandably, very worried.

Members on this side of the House have already outlined earlier today the sleight of hand that this Government has employed at the Nambour Hospital. It has not filled some 25 full-time equivalent positions—permanent positions. Those positions have not been filled with permanent people. They have not been advertised. That has been a deliberate ploy of this Government. I will be seeking to talk to the Queensland Nurses Union about that as well. A lot of its members are badly affected. Under this Minister, they have been put into casual positions, or there has not been the opportunity to take on that permanent work.

I am talking about a major hospital which has a \$2.5m budget overrun. I have the Budget papers here, and they show clearly that that overrun is owned by this current Government, not by the previous Government. The Nambour Hospital is a very fast growing hospital. But the Health Minister, vaguely and suddenly, does not know about those 25 full-time equivalent positions. I have the documentation, and I am happy to table the documents that show clearly that the Health Minister was well aware that 36 beds were closed at that hospital. Or has she been signing other letters that she has not been reading? Members saw the Health Minister's performance here in Parliament this morning. This is a do-nothing Government with a do-nothing Minister who does not even know what she signs.

Those 36 beds were closed, and they are still closed. I challenge the Minister right now: get your television cameras and let us go in there and have a look at those beds. They are still closed.

Surgery waiting lists at the Nambour Hospital are going through the roof. I have letters from constituents who are in pain waiting for surgery, particularly for orthopaedic surgery, for which the list is extremely long. For the benefit of the record, I will get the exact figure for the semi-urgent waiting list for orthopaedic surgery as at 1 July 1998, which was the last period for which figures were available when the coalition was in Government. For orthopaedic surgery, the figure was 1.7% for long waits for semi-urgent surgery. Under this Government, that figure has jumped to nearly 30%. That represents a lot of people on the semi-urgent surgery waiting list who are waiting for very necessary operations. That situation is continuing to get worse. I have letters from constituents. It is real people who are paying that price.

Even the district manager, in his reports, has said that, in real terms, they have gone backwards with their budget. So all this talk about having increased budgets is just a load of baloney. Under the coalition Government, something like half the percentage of people were waiting too long for semi-urgent surgery. But under this can't do Government, what has it done? In fact, it has doubled the percentage of people who are waiting too long for that surgery. The district manager's report states—

"Action aimed at reining in the increasing over budget result has been approved by the Office of the Director-General and the Minister's office. These include the closure of beds at Nambour General Hospital and a range of other activities. The bed closures have already generated media attention."

Let us get the cameras in and go and see the beds that are still closed. The Government tried to claim at the time that it was seasonal. If it was seasonal, it is now March, those beds are still closed and people are still waiting.

I now want to address the mental health issue and the Minister's appalling response during question time this morning. She said that there was no indication of a lack of acute beds in south-east Queensland for mental health patients. Who on earth does she talk to? Who on earth is briefing the Health Minister? She certainly is not listening to the psychiatrists in the AMA. The AMA put out a press release last week in which it said—

"A not uncommon scenario is for a patient to be sent from the Brisbane area to Nambour because none of the Brisbane Hospitals have acute psychiatric beds available."

In a question this morning, the member for Indooroopilly outlined an example of a man who had threatened to kill his wife and himself. He had OD'd. He was taken to the hospital. They could not get him a mental health bed—once he was cleaned up after having OD'd—and he had to go into a medical ward in a public hospital. I am talking about a man who had threatened to kill himself and his wife. If Government members think that is appropriate, and if their Government thinks that is appropriate, and if the Health Minister thinks that is appropriate, then that is a disgrace.

Psychiatrists from the AMA and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists have been asking for a number of months for a review of mental health beds in south-east Queensland. But the Health Minister stood in the House today and claimed to know nothing about it. I think that she had better start talking to those people who have been calling for that. There is a need for a review. Members on this side of the House outlined an example of that this morning. There are other examples.

Obviously, the Health Minister was not listening to the media last week when the AMA put out a press release about a bed crisis for psychiatric patients. The AMA went on to say—

"A lack of beds in south-east Queensland hospitals means at times acute psychiatric patients are not being admitted to psychiatric units."

There is something terribly wrong. This Health Minister has no idea. She is out of control, and the Government and the Premier are going to do nothing about her performance.

Members would also be aware of the situation on the Gold Coast. The Health Minister obviously still thinks it is acceptable for someone to wait 28 hours for surgery. There is a problem on the Gold Coast. They still need additional money and additional staff. But the Health Minister thinks that that waiting time for surgery is acceptable. As I understand it, medical staff on the Gold Coast have said that it would take about six hours for a person who was inebriated to be ready for anaesthesia. Yet a person in those circumstances still had to wait more than 20 hours for very important surgery. Obviously there is a problem when there are not enough people in accident and emergency and on the operating staff to be able to deal with a situation like that and the other priorities that are coming through the door. That that person had to wait so long is an absolute disgrace. The Minister has not taken responsibility. She will obviously be looking for a scapegoat there, as well.

Then there is Bundaberg. We all know that the Health Minister does not read her mail about Bundaberg, because she signed off on the closure of the general outpatients clinic in Bundaberg. She

sent me a letter three days before she went up there and the media asked her about it. She went all vague, because she does not know what mail she signs. Services in our regional hospitals are being reduced. This Government is failing to fund those regional hospitals. It is also failing to fund the hospitals in Brisbane.

This Health Minister is out of control. She does not know what is going on. There is a \$50m blow-out in the Health budget. Surgery lists are going through roof. And when it comes to people's real issues and real problems, she does not know what is going on. Furthermore, in light of the Health Minister's claims that there were budget overruns carried into this financial year, and despite the Minister's Budget papers stating that "as expenditure was within the approved budget no budget supplementation was necessary", the question will continue to be asked of the Minister: if she is claiming that there were budget overruns, is she still going to pay her director-general his \$60,000 performance bonus?

Time expired.

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