



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

---

Hansard 10 November 1999

### **ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (6.24 p.m.): I join this debate to support wholeheartedly the motion moved by the member for Maroochydore that this Parliament condemns the Minister for Health for her callous manipulation of elective surgery waiting list figures that provide shallow self-promotion while ignoring the plight and pain of thousands of patients who are waiting for surgery.

There is no better illustration of the Beattie Government's preoccupation with information manipulation than this Minister's handling of the Health Department and surgery waiting lists in particular. The tragic fact is that no matter how those waiting list figures are manipulated they represent an intolerable burden of pain and frustration for thousands of Queenslanders. In my electorate office I deal with many people who are simply not getting a fair go from the health system and who know from first-hand experience that the Minister's rhetoric on this issue shows her callous disregard for the truth.

Tonight I will cite an example—a very human and real example; I could have picked from many—that puts a very human face to the rhetoric and the meaningless statistics that we see the Minister continually presenting to this Parliament. In early March I was approached by one of my constituents, Mr Geoff Lewis of Biggenden, who had been advised that he would need a knee replacement operation. He had been advised by the surgeon at the Bundaberg Hospital that he would need to wait at least 12 months for the surgery, even though that very day he had seen the Minister on television saying that waiting times at Bundaberg did not exceed four months. Because his pain was obvious, on 18 March I wrote to the Minister for Health concerning Mr Lewis' situation. In a letter dated 27 April, the Minister replied—

"The District Manager, Bundaberg District Health Service has advised that Mr Lewis was seen in the Orthopaedic Clinic on 25 February 1999 and at this visit a decision was made to list Mr Lewis for a total knee replacement ... Mr Lewis can expect his operation to take place at the end of August 1999."

On 30 September, one month after the operation was promised by the Minister, I was again contacted by Mr Lewis. He provided me with a copy of a letter from his local doctor to the director of orthopaedics at the Bundaberg Hospital, which stated—

"As of today"—

that is, 30 September—

"he has not had any further contact regarding his operation. His knee is progressively painful."

That is what this debate is about. That is why this House should carry this motion. In common with so many others, this man has waited seven months, with no contact from the Bundaberg Hospital—a month longer than the Minister promised him and three months longer than the Minister quoted to the whole of Bundaberg and central Queensland in her television appearances. There has been no contact from the surgeon and the hospital. Can honourable members imagine what it would be like to get up each day and wait for the phone to ring or for a letter to come, and all the while the pain was getting worse? The Minister promised surgery by the end of August. August came and went, with no contact, no communication and no surgery from the Bundaberg Hospital. On 7 October I again wrote to the Minister. Five weeks after the promised date of the surgery, I have still not received a reply from the Minister's office. I made contact with the elective surgery coordinator at the Bundaberg

Hospital and I was unable to get any confirmation of a planned date for Mr Lewis' operation. I was able to get only a vague prediction that it would be some time next year.

This morning I again rang Mr Lewis. He still has not had any contact at all from the Bundaberg Hospital and he still has not had a date set for his operation. I queried the definition of "elective surgery" with the coordinator at the Bundaberg Hospital and I was advised that "elective surgery" meant by choice, preferred or selected. This definition is hardly appropriate in the case of degenerative conditions that require knee and hip replacements and which cause increasing pain over time and completely ruin the quality of life of many sufferers.

This motion is about the quality of life of so many Queenslanders—people whose lives are being destroyed by their inability to access badly needed surgery at places such as the Bundaberg Hospital, while the Minister for Health stubbornly refuses to even acknowledge that there is a problem. Tonight the Minister should be condemned for that callous disregard. This motion is all about people—people who wait patiently in the face of ever-increasing pain for the surgery that is promised. They are the reality of the waiting list figures. They are the human face of the issue which the Minister chooses to ignore in the pursuit of a political defence to cover an intolerable situation. This House should carry the motion moved by the member for Maroochydore and condemn the Minister for Health for her callous disregard for the pain and plight of thousands of patients who are awaiting surgery.

---