



Speech by

Hon. MERRI ROSE

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Ambulance Usage

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.16 a.m.), by leave: The Queensland Ambulance Service is not a taxi service. Unfortunately, some people consider ambulances to be nothing more than a free taxi ride. Patient transport officers and ambulance officers relate stories of patients who ask them to stop off at the shopping centre on the way home from a visit to hospital so that they can do their grocery or personal shopping. There have even been instances of family members in their own vehicles following ambulances transporting patients to hospital for routine check-ups and then following them home again. There have been requests for ambulance transport to appointments in the city because able-bodied people refuse to pay parking fees or because they refuse to drive in city traffic. Some have even contacted the ambulance call centre and have been waiting on the kerb, bags packed, when it arrives.

The tasks of ambulance officers include emergency dashes to deliver critically ill or seriously injured patients to hospital after road or workplace accidents, a cardiac arrest, or a sporting injury. It could be non-urgent or routine transport. It could be a matter of taking a frail or disabled patient to or from a hospital appointment or for a medical check-up at their doctor's surgery. It could relate to clinical cases, routine admissions or hospital discharges.

More than two million Queenslanders are either ambulance subscribers, dependants of subscribers or are covered by the free service provided from 1 January this year to up to 850,000 pensioners, Seniors Card holders and their dependants. All are eligible for emergency and non-urgent or routine transport. It is vitally important that we use our resources wisely.

Misuse of the Ambulance Service could result in valuable resources being tied up when they could be used for the treatment or transport of more needy patients. The QAS patient transport guidelines have been revised, reinforcing the need to use resources wisely. Cases where non-urgent or routine transport may be required include instances in which the patient will be medically unsuitable for public or private transport and will normally require stretcher transport; where the patient will require active management or monitoring in transit; or where it is a patient whose condition would cause them to be either gravely embarrassed or unacceptable to other people in public transport.

Pamphlets detailing patient transport eligibility and providing appropriate service contact details and suggested transport alternatives are being widely distributed in the general community and a guidebook will be circulated to ambulance and major service users. Doctors and other health professionals will receive posters, charts and pamphlets and be briefed on new guidelines from this month onwards.

All requests for routine transports must be authorised by a doctor. All requests for inter-facility transfers or aeromedical transports must be authorised by a doctor. This has always been the case. In order to cater for the legitimate needs of patients, routine or non-urgent transports must be notified at least 24 hours in advance. Some transports can be booked much earlier.

The QAS is merely asking health professionals and people who use ambulance transport to be responsible and use commonsense when they call for transport and to consider whether alternative arrangements, such as family or friends, subsidised taxis, community or volunteer transport groups and public transport, are appropriate. People should not expect an ambulance to turn up for non-genuine, non-urgent transport.

But people can be assured that those who require emergency treatment or transport will continue to be cared for by the QAS and that non-urgent transport will continue for genuine cases. It is important that those not covered by the Government's free ambulance policy subscribe to the QAS. We have the best Ambulance Service in Australia and one of the best in the world. By using the service responsibly, people can help the QAS save lives. By calling only in cases of genuine need, they can help the QAS ensure that the right ambulance gets to the right patient at the right time.
