



Speech by

**PHIL REEVES**

**MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD**

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Hansard 9 March 1999

#### HEALTH PORTFOLIO

**Mr REEVES** (Mansfield—ALP) (6.50 p.m.): Far from criticising this Government's contribution to health services on the Sunshine Coast, members opposite should be praising us for the high quality of services we are providing in the region and the new initiatives we have taken which are benefiting all Sunshine Coast families. Let me list some of them for those opposite to refresh their memories.

This financial year Nambour Hospital received a \$3.2m boost in funding in recognition of the areas of special needs. This included \$1m for 12 new mental health beds and \$2.2m to address the immediate concerns in areas including intensive care, renal dialysis and special surgical services. We have the crocodile tears of the former Treasurer, who whipped \$4m out of the Nambour Hospital's capital works budget to pork-barrel her own electorate and in the same process then agreed to the Horan health tax.

I am sure the parents of the 2,000 children at Burnside and Nambour State High Schools are incredibly pleased with the Government's school nurse initiative. Those students now have a health professional they can come to know and trust and who can give them advice on medical services available in their local community. The school nurses can also get to know the young people and pick up the early signs of problems such as eating disorders or mental disturbance.

Another great boost for the families on the Sunshine Coast is the Government's early intervention and parenting support initiative. Nambour and Maroochydore are two of the 15 locations around Queensland which will benefit from this positive parenting initiative, which is enormously important to parents with young families. We are giving them the skills they need to develop close and meaningful relationships with their children. This will work well throughout their lives.

The Sunshine Coast is also getting the opportunity to trial new-style child health centres. This is an important back-up service to help parents and families. The Sunshine Coast centre will expand the services currently available from the existing Nambour and Maroochydore community child health centres. Mental health services have also been expanded on the Sunshine Coast as part of the State's record boost to mental health services. The Sunshine Coast has gained another child and youth mental health worker since this Government came to office.

I turn now to another health district and the management of the Toowoomba District Health Service, which has been a major cause of concern for some time. Let us look clearly at what those opposite are saying: the Minister is fully responsible for the public hospitals but should not do anything to rectify problems occurring in them. It is like telling the West Indian cricket team's selectors that it is all their fault for the collapse this morning, but they are not allowed to improve the team by changing it.

While the Toowoomba Hospital has an excellent staff and provides a high quality of care to those treated at the hospital, it has the worst financial record of any hospital in Queensland. It completed the 1997-98 financial year \$2.3m in the red and the budget has continued to blow out during this financial year to an unacceptable and unsustainable level. It has become clear that a restructure and change of direction are needed to introduce modern management practices to increase the amount of surgery performed at the Toowoomba Hospital each year. It is estimated by Queensland Health that, for the dollars spent on health services in Toowoomba, an additional 500 Toowoomba people should have received surgery during the past 12 months.

That is the full measure of the incompetence of the former Health Minister and member for Toowoomba South, who allowed archaic management practices to thrive in Toowoomba under his

stewardship. When he was the Minister, the member for Toowoomba South closed beds quicker than West Indian wickets fell this morning. That is not surprising when this member was the champion of the budget blow-outs. He would have done Christopher Skase proud.

Managers do have a responsibility to manage their budgets without cutting the range of services or reducing the number of permanent staff. In some exceptional circumstances, such as high growth areas like the Gold Coast, we have taken steps to compensate for high population growth and extra pressure on the hospital. For example, a special working party investigated problems at the Gold Coast Hospital late last year. It made a series of recommendations, including that an additional orthopaedic surgeon and a full-time paediatrician be appointed at the Gold Coast Hospital. It also recommended additional beds for winter this year and the expansion of local community health services.

So honourable members can see from this brief survey that each hospital and health district is different. Each of them has its own problems and challenges, and we respond to those challenges in the way that best meets the needs of the local area. The bottom line is that we are in the business of providing high quality health services to all Queenslanders.

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