



Speech by

PHIL REEVES

MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

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HEALTH SERVICES

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (6.30 p.m.): I assure the House that I intend to actually talk about health. Let the Opposition bleat about alleged cuts to our public hospitals. It needs to face the facts. This Government is delivering extra staff and services where they are most needed: at the coalface of our public hospitals—the emergency departments.

Labor was elected with an eight-point strategy to reduce waiting lists. Improving waiting times in emergency departments is one of the central planks of this policy. Our waiting list reduction strategy has seen waiting lists published for the very first time. Under this Government, waiting times for elective surgery at our major hospitals are published every four months in the elective surgery waiting list report. This is sent to hospitals and GPs and is published on the Internet.

It was a Labor election commitment to open the State's waiting list to public scrutiny. This can be compared with the coalition's tactics of releasing only selective and manipulated data. It was determined to conceal the real number of people waiting for elective surgery in Queensland. Members opposite still write to the Health Minister asking her what the waiting times are at such-and-such a hospital. They still put in FOI requests about waiting times. They do not have a clue. They cannot face the fact that this Government has finally brought about some honesty and transparency in relation to hospital waiting times.

Our strategy to address waiting times in emergency departments is a first for Queensland. The issue has not been tackled before in a systematic way. Hospitals had not been asked to report on whether they were meeting the benchmarks. Labor recognised the problem and listened to the people who were delivering and using the services, and now we are delivering. The strategy is a comprehensive one. It is not about window-dressing. It meets the requirements of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine.

People who turn up to an emergency department of one of our public hospitals may have to wait for one or two things, which are the things that this policy addresses. They are the waiting time before being seen by a medical officer and the waiting time between being treated in an emergency department and gaining access to a hospital bed in a ward.

Honourable members might ask what we are doing about this. We have allocated \$17.5m to this problem. We are doing three main things. First, we are putting in information systems for a Statewide benchmarking process. Second, we are improving the way hospital beds are used. Third, we are increasing the number of medical and nursing staff at the coalface. Let us look at what we have achieved so far.

Mr Borbidge: Forget about the patients. Just concentrate on bed numbers.

Mr REEVES: The Leader of the Opposition should listen and learn. We have an extra 17 emergency medicine staff specialists in 16 of Queensland's largest hospitals, including two at the Gold Coast. We appointed them, not the coalition. We have training and workshops of emergency department staff to look at issues such as data collection and benchmarking processes.

Mr Lucas: They hate hearing it.

Mr REEVES: They certainly do. They hate hearing the truth. That is why the member for Moggill wanted to talk about anything but health. They hate hearing the truth about health.

We have new computer information systems in emergency departments at the Cairns, Toowoomba, Redcliffe and Caboolture Hospitals. Extra nurses have been appointed at the Mount Isa and Bundaberg emergency departments.

What are we doing this year? This Government has just announced that an extra 11 emergency registered nurses will be appointed. That means extra nurses and more jobs for Mount Isa, Ipswich, Logan, Mackay, Redcliffe and Bundaberg. These nurses manage the work flow through these busy departments. They prioritise and get patients through. This Government has allocated not one-off but recurrent funding for these positions. Recurrent funding shows that we are committed to tackling these problems and to making sure that Queenslanders have access to timely and safe emergency department services.

I do not think this Government should apologise for giving our public hospitals the funding and resources to address this issue, which those opposite never wanted to address. This Government is putting patients first, instead of point scoring.

I thank the PA Hospital, which I attended to have my back fixed. The nurses and staff were excellent. I am proud of the excellent service I received in the public hospital that we on the Brisbane south side are very proud of. I thank them for fixing up my back.
