



Speech by

Hon. WENDY EDMOND

MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Hansard 10 November 1999

ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS

Hon. W. M EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha) (Minister for Health) (6.15 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"Delete all words after 'Parliament' and insert the following—

'congratulates the Minister for Health for removing the secrecy and openly publishing the Queensland elective surgery waiting list figures hospital by hospital, category by category, and speciality by speciality.' "

The Opposition's motion is desperate and it is dishonest. There has been no manipulation of waiting list figures. The waiting list data is available to all. The quarterly elective waiting list report is put on noticeboards in hospitals. It is available at the rooms of local GPs. It is available on the Internet. The media receives copies. Thousands of these things are printed and distributed across Queensland. Only the member for Maroochydore cannot find them. She is the only person I know who does not seem to be able to find them. For the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition—who, this morning, had to be reminded of the months that make up winter—I point out that "quarterly" means figures that are published every three months.

The quarterly report for July, August and September was published at the end of October. This data is collected by exactly the same method used by the Opposition when it was in Government. The only difference is that this Government publishes the data openly and honestly as part of its elective surgery strategy and as part of its commitment to open and accountable Government. The Opposition only ever leaked the good news and covered up the bad news.

These are the facts: on 1 October 1999, 2.9% of Category 1 patients had waited longer than 30 days. In October 1998, 2% of patients had waited too long, and in October 1997, 4.8% of patients were considered to have waited too long. Of Category 2 patients, which are the semi-urgent cases, on 1 October 1999 the long waits were 9.9%. That is a better result than was ever achieved by the Opposition when it was in Government. That figure is down from 1,462 patients to 946 patients, which is a drop of 35%. Despite this, members opposite still whinge and whine. In October 1998, Category 2 long waits were 14.7%, and in October 1997 under the coalition they were 42.9%. Did we see that figure on the Internet? Did the coalition put that figure on the hospital noticeboards? You can bet your bottom dollar that it did not!

I give the House two very good examples that illustrate this Government's performance. When this Government came to power, two of the worst performing hospitals were the Gold Coast Hospital and the Toowoomba Hospital, which also had the biggest budget blow-out. My predecessor as Minister for Health, the member for Toowoomba South, did not tell us about that, did he? Did he tell us anything about the figures then? Did he tell us anything about how the budget blow-out in Toowoomba was worse than anywhere else in the State? The silence from the Leader of the Opposition was also deafening.

Members should consider this: on 1 October 1998, 37.5% of Category 2 patients at the Gold Coast Hospital had waited too long for surgery. That was the legacy of the coalition Government. On 1 October this year, long waits in Category 2 at the Gold Coast Hospital were 9% and improving. On 1 October 1998, three months after this Government won office, Category 2 long waits at the

Toowoomba Hospital were 26.3%. In October this year, Category 2 long waits had been reduced to 12% at the Toowoomba Hospital. The budget is coming in and it is improving.

Obviously, Opposition members got a bit excited when they read Saturday's Courier-Mail, which published an article that—shock, horror—said that the number of people waiting too long for elective surgery had increased in the September quarter compared with the June quarter. That is comparing apples with oranges. Every media statement about waiting lists that I put out states that waiting lists go up and down. Elective surgery is about 15% of the total hospital activity and seasonal factors such as winter make a difference.

I can understand why the Opposition got so excited by that Courier-Mail article. It is beyond the ability of Opposition members to come up with any original ideas, so they thought that they would climb on the bandwagon. I am sorry to say that the article's heading was also wrong—dead wrong. There have been no funding cuts to any hospital in Queensland, and that includes the RBH. As an aside, I must point out that in October this year patient activity at the RBH was up by 6.4% when compared to October last year. That means that the RBH is seeing more patients than ever before, not fewer.

The Opposition is, indeed, desperate and dateless. It operates in a policy-free zone. Its only Health policy offering is to bring back the seventies model of hospital boards that left a heritage of run-down hospitals, no community health, a mental health system that was condemned worldwide and, added to that, a \$700m debt that was run up by the hospital boards for Queensland Health to repay.

Time expired.
