



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 6 September 2000

HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.27 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Maroochydore, namely that this House condemns the Beattie Labor Government for allowing hospital waiting lists to grow, for cutting back on intensive care beds and for bad management practices that have placed dangerously high pressure on staff.

The real tragedy for public hospital patients in Queensland is that the coalition was not able to finish the job started by Mike Horan in early 1996. The member for Toowoomba South inherited from the current Premier the worst Category 1 waiting lists in Australia. That is the reality. But in just two years and four months of coalition know-how and back-to-basics management, we turned the worst waiting lists in Australia into the best. Mike Horan got to work and organised the money, the training and the staff to make an all-out offensive on bringing waiting times down. That is what the member for Toowoomba South did while he was the Minister. The coalition's Surgery on Time project initially included 10 major hospitals. The first target we set was for Category 1—the urgent cases requiring surgery in 30 days or less.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Dr WATSON: Are we going to have this continuing nonsense from the Minister for Health?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! The member for Moggill would like to be heard. I ask the Minister and the member for Toowoomba South to have a conversation outside; otherwise I will warn both of them.

Dr WATSON: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The target was that 95% of Category 1 patients would get surgery within 30 days. We reached that target. In fact, when the coalition left Government 98% of all Category 1 patients were receiving their surgery on time within 30 days. An estimated 13,000 Queenslanders had operations under the coalition that they simply would not have been able to get had Labor stayed in power. Compare that with the record of Peter Beattie while he was in charge of Health. Under Labor only 51% of Category 1 patients were receiving their surgery within 30 days. So we had 51% under Labor and 98% under the coalition and Mike Horan as Health Minister. The worst waiting list in Australia under Labor became the best waiting list in Australia under the coalition.

Clearly, while Labor's Health Minister was doing a hundred days of listening a lot of Queenslanders were doing many painful days of waiting. Perhaps I am being a bit harsh on Mr Beattie. After all, he did inherit most of the mess from his now deputy, the former Minister for Health, Jim Elder. One wonders whether the Health portfolio is to State Labor what the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio is to Federal Labor. Is Health its poisoned chalice? One thing is for sure: Labor's management of Health is sickening a lot of Queenslanders. It is difficult to tell just how sick the patient is because of Labor's spin doctoring of the figures. But the AMA has not fallen for it. It knows that the waiting list numbers do not add up and do not gel with the anecdotal evidence from the community. The AMA, which was disparaged a moment ago by the member for Cairns, is launching an investigation.

One thing we do know is that in Queensland right now just getting onto a specialist appointment list is very difficult. As that poor person on the Gold Coast mentioned a moment ago by the member for

Maroochydore discovered, with Labor running Health in Queensland we virtually need an appointment to get an appointment to get an appointment. That is not good enough.

To make matters worse, the Health Minister has admitted that negotiations are well under way to close around 90 specialist outpatient clinics at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Mrs Edmond justifies this cutback by saying that those places will be made available where people live out in the suburbs. But that simply has not happened. There is no evidence of any major uptake in specialist clinics at the Logan Hospital, the Redland Hospital, the Caboolture Hospital, the Ipswich Hospital or the Redcliffe Hospital.

Under the coalition we had a Health Minister who got everyone working together and cooperating to deliver the service—surgery on time. Under Labor we have a Premier implying that hardworking nurses are whingers. Under Labor we had big dollars being spent, but no action.

Time expired.
