



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 30 May 2000

HEALTH SERVICES, SUNSHINE COAST

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (7.21 p.m.): Today I tabled a petition from a further 500 signatories supporting improved cancer services on the Sunshine Coast. I renew my call for the Health Minister to heed the voice of the Sunshine Coast people. The petitions I have tabled so far add up to about 8,500 signatories and reflect the strong community support for public radiation therapy services to be provided on the Sunshine Coast. The provision of improved services is not a frivolous matter and I have concerns that people are waiting up to six weeks for treatment in Brisbane, resulting in people's lives being threatened.

Hundreds of Sunshine Coast cancer patients requiring this treatment have the added burden of having to make numerous trips to Brisbane in addition to waiting too long for treatment. Since the petition was started by Nambour solicitor Warren Gardiner, there has been a terrific community response. There has also been the news that the Wesley Cancer Centre will establish a private facility on the Sunshine Coast from the first part of next year which will provide a more immediate way for the Government to make available local services for public patients in their own area—if it heeds our call to purchase services from the private provider for the public patients. This is certainly an option for addressing in a very immediate way the lengthy waiting time for radiation therapy services as well as providing a local service in our area until such time as a public facility can be built.

I wish also to correct the record in relation to the Nambour Hospital capital works budget 1998-99. The coalition budget clearly had \$3.6m more allocated for capital works at the Nambour Hospital. The incoming Labor Government reduced the budget in its first year by \$3.6m and has downgraded and slowed down the capital works program at the Nambour Hospital.

I wish also to address the situation at the Nanango Hospital. The Beattie Labor Government has broken its promise to the people of Nanango not to downgrade their hospital and has abused their trust. Last year a secret Health Department report outlining plans to close the Nanango Hospital became public. The community rallied and spoke out strongly in support of their hospital, and the Government accused them of scaremongering and downplayed the significance of this official document.

The Beattie Labor Government then promised not to downgrade the hospital, but it lied, as the events of last week have demonstrated. After involving community members in consultation, last week the Government abused that trust and moved to close the hospital's women's ward and divided into halves the seven-bed men's ward to accommodate the "new" women's ward. A partition has been constructed, leaving a less than adequate number of beds for the community, which is now facing the winter season and the onset of what is always an increased number of medical cases requiring hospitalisation.

Respite services will be provided in the old women's ward. I have been told that this may be on average for two days a week and four hours per day. In addition, there is concern in the community that some people may be misled as to the number of triage cases being undertaken through accident and emergency. In 1998-99, 561 such cases were triaged through the Nanango Hospital. In comparison, the Kingaroy Hospital had 827.

There is a lot of concern in the Nanango community that there are moves by stealth to downgrade their facilities, that the goodwill and involvement of people in the community in the

consultation about the future of the hospital have been abused and that actions have been taken without consulting the staff and community members that have resulted in alterations to the layout of and the removal of beds from that hospital. It is understandable that people want to maintain their hospital. They do not want to see a downgrading or a tendency, as there has been over the past couple of years under this Government, to pass off the concerns of people by saying that it is not an important facility. It is a very important facility to this community. They have long cherished it. They have a need for it to remain as a hospital into the future so that the needs of that community are addressed.

When we look at the figures for accident and emergency triage undertaken at that hospital, we see that there is quite a demand for those facilities. A recent accident in the area involving an overturned truck highlighted the necessity for the provision of local services to address such emergencies. It is very important that the Nanango Hospital remain as a hospital and as a strong facility that is not downgraded by stealth, as has been the intent and demonstrated action of this Government.
