



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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MACKAY; SUGAR INDUSTRY

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.22 p.m.): There is a growing concern in the public health service, particularly in the Mackay and district area, about the quality of health services and, most importantly, the adequacy of funding available to those health services. My colleague the member for Mirani has stood up for the health workers and for the consumers of health services in that area. For that he has been personally attacked by the Health Minister. He has not received a constructive response to the very real concerns being expressed by the community.

What we are seeing across the State, and certainly in Mackay, is that more and more health workers are under increasing pressure—as they see that their budgets are inadequate to meet the responsibilities of their jobs and as they see people in pain and discomfort, unable to access services at this major regional base hospital. Under the code of conduct this Government is enforcing, if these health workers were to speak out they would lose their jobs. They are in fear of speaking out about what is really going on in the health services. When the member for Mirani stands up on their behalf, as their voice for the community, the Minister's response is a personal attack.

Our message to this Minister and this Government is that they are making the same mistake that the Goss Government made. The Government is making the same mistake in the way it is managing—or mismanaging—public health services. If the Government does not enter into a proper partnership with the community and health professionals and create an environment in which health workers can deliver quality care and ensure they are not operating in fear of being sacked if they dare to speak out about cutbacks in services, it will see more and more people leaving the very proud public hospital system. That is what is happening.

When specialists and highly qualified health professionals, be they qualified nurses in certain specialised areas or other workers, start leaving the public hospital system, as they are certainly doing in Mackay and other areas, it is very hard to attract them back to the public health system. What does this Health Minister do? She then attacks the specialists and the lack of access to those qualified staff and says, "We can't get the staff. Therefore, we cannot supply the service." That is the real shame of what this Government is doing. It is taking these people out of the system. The people who are losing are those who need access to the public hospital system.

There has been a loss of specialist services from Mackay. What is very worrying is the ongoing situation in the intensive care unit there. I understand that there has been an explanation from the district manager that some of this is temporary, during the redevelopment, but the concerns of the staff are persisting. They say they are concerned that the level of intensive care services previously in place will not be able to be continued. There are many different levels of intensive care practice, but it is linked to the level of service that that hospital will be able to deliver in the future. Once we lose staff with those very specialised skills, be they intensive care nurses who have operated at a high level or others, we will see those patients moved out to Townsville and to other hospitals. As that happens, those staff will become increasingly difficult to replace.

The code of conduct that this Government is enforcing is a real weapon of fear and intimidation. It is a frustration for many health workers. This is why we have seen the AMA move with its report card on the public health system throughout Queensland. It recognises that the story coming out of the

mouthpieces of bureaucracy and the Health Minister about the state of the public health system is very different from the story the workers are telling.

Disappointingly, the member for Logan's attitude is to attack the messenger again. He sent a hate-filled message to the doctors who are speaking out. I say to the member for Logan: those doctors care about their patients. He seems to dislike more than just the doctors. He also seems to dislike a range of lower paid, casual workers who are seeing for themselves the problems in these hospitals.

Mackay is a major regional centre. It deserves adequate funding. It is not getting it. More than that, the partnership that is needed with health professionals, to maintain them within the public hospital system, has broken down because this Government cannot manage it and is not interested in keeping them in the system.

There is also a concern about the lack of adequate funding for the renal unit—that only 10 dialysis places were funded by Queensland Health. I understand that, currently, the base hospital is treating 14 patients under extreme funding difficulty. It is causing difficulties for people who want to be treated in their local community or who want to move back into their local community. There is great pressure on them to relocate to other communities in which those services are available. Mackay needs to have that growth funding available to ensure that there is adequate funding to deal with those renal patients well into the future. It needs to be recognised that some of these people are not able to enter into home dialysis. It may be appropriate for some, but for others—

Time expired.
