



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.43 p.m.): I think the first thing that needs to be said in this debate tonight is that it is not a debate that we could have had under the coalition Government. And why not? Because the facts were never out there in the open!

Mr Mickel: You had to FOI them.

Dr CLARK: Exactly. Members had to FOI them. They were never out there.

Mrs Edmond: You didn't get them. They refused point blank to release them.

Dr CLARK: I take the Minister's interjection. We could not even get them under FOI. I was not in the Parliament then. I am even more appalled—

Mrs Edmond: We didn't get one document under FOI—not one piece of paper.

Dr CLARK: Exactly!

Mr Mickel: Do you know why? Because Toowoomba Hospital had the worst figures!

Dr CLARK: I have heard, too, that Toowoomba Hospital had the worst figures in Category 3. We actually found out about that later and, yes, we have managed to improve them.

Let me go back to the issue in relation to the AMA. That has been talked about tonight. We have heard about this report card. This has to be a cynical political exercise, and why? Because one of the things that AMA says it is going to get is information about waiting lists! It is already out there. What kind of waiting list information does it want? Obviously the kind that is doctored! Obviously the kind that is going to be used for political point scoring! The Beattie Government should be congratulated on bringing openness and accountability to the hospital waiting lists.

There are also games being played in Cairns. The member for Cairns has made mention of this already. Let me say that Dr Peter Smith, who chairs the local branch of the division of general practice said in the Cairns Post that anything that highlighted the true state of the city's public health services was welcome. He has to go no further than the published waiting list data. Honourable members can be sure that the true state of affairs in Cairns is never going to come out through the AMA; its political agenda is never going to allow it.

Getting back to the point I am making, our openness and our accountability is something that we are proud of. Under Labor we publish waiting lists every quarter for the 33 reporting hospitals. We have now been doing that for eight reports. We give them to GPs. We give them to the media. We probably even give them to the Opposition. We make it available on the Internet. Anybody who wants it can see it; it is there. I have gone into hospitals. I am sure members opposite have gone into hospitals. I know that members on this side of the House have. What do we see in any hospital? We see posted up on the walls this information on waiting lists!

Mr Mickel: You see it at the Logan Hospital, that's for sure.

Dr CLARK: We do see that at Logan. I have seen it in hospitals in Cairns. We walk out of the lift and usually there it is.

Mrs Edmond: It is in the lift at Nambour.

Dr CLARK: It is in the lift at Nambour.

We want people to know. We are not hiding anything. We are actually providing that information, particularly to GPs so they can know which hospitals have spare capacity so that patients can be referred there accordingly. Publishing those waiting list figures ensures that hospitals actually manage better. We can pinpoint which hospitals are performing extremely well and which need assistance to improve their performance. We do not mind saying that there is a difference. I think it actually creates a bit of good competition between hospitals. They do not want to look at those published reports and see that they are not doing as well as the hospital in the next city. We are out there telling people exactly what is happening. The coalition did not have the guts to publish waiting lists. It just picked out the bits that it wanted to tell. It did not tell us exactly what was going on.

I am proud to tell honourable members what is going on in Cairns in terms of Category 1; 100% receive treatment on time. In Category 2, 97% are seen on time. In Category 3, yes, there are problems, but the point is we know what the problem is. That problem is actually better now than it used to be. We know why members opposite are in here talking about Category 3, because they cannot bear to acknowledge that we are actually doing well with Category 1 and Category 2. So, no, they have to find something else, and it is Category 3. We are not walking away from that problem. We know it is there, but we are being honest about it.

We are not in here scoring political points, as the Opposition is on this issue. Our Government's comprehensive waiting list reduction strategy has brought openness and accountability to waiting lists. Most importantly, the waiting list reduction strategy has been successful in reducing waiting times for elective surgery and seeing an impressive increase in surgery throughput, and nothing annoys the members opposite more than that. The Government has not buried its head in the sand, though. We have railed against the Federal Government, because that is where we need to get a bit of honesty into this debate. We need to have acknowledged exactly what the Federal Government is doing in terms of its subsidy of private health insurance.

Time expired.
