



Speech by

Mr ROB MITCHELL

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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DISTRICT HEALTH AREAS

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers—NPA) (7.29 p.m.): As many members will be aware, district health areas were established some four years ago by the coalition Government to rid Queensland Health of the top-heavy regional health bureaucracy established by the Goss administration in the early 1990s. The regional health system was a very expensive operation and a burden on the Queensland Health budget in that money was being spent on endless layers of administration at the expense of service delivery in our hospitals.

As I mentioned in the House this morning, I have obtained information about the budgetary situation of the Moranbah Health District which indicates that the Beattie Labor Government has reduced funding for health services in the region. Information made available to me indicates that the budget allocation for 1999 was \$7.53m, but the current budget total is \$7.39m. That is a reduction of \$160,000. That is bad enough, but it is only the tip of the iceberg of service reductions in the area.

The real problem is better understood when one sees that the allocation for the district office has actually been increased from \$1.2m to \$1.595m from last year. This represented an increase to the district office of some \$345,000, and \$1.24m over the last four years. So we see that, despite the cut of \$160,000, the district office budget has increased. Guess where the money came from? It came from where the public and the Opposition has been telling the Minister it came from: it has been dragged out of the hospitals and community health centres, and that is putting lives at risk.

Staff vacancies at the coalface are not being filled, but in the meantime the number of staff at the district office has increased from 4 to 11 in the past three years. At the Clermont Hospital, for example, the nursing staff levels are three registered nurses short and five enrolled nurses short at a time when the district office is increasing staff.

Honourable members can see from this information just why the Minister for Health refuses to release detailed budgetary information. She must know what the real situation is, yet day after day she gets up in this House and denies that the health system is in crisis. Each day in this House she denies that the budgets have been cut. She denies that there are staff shortages and that lives are in danger.
