



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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SPECIALIST HEALTH SERVICES

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.22 p.m.): While the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, engages in a brawl with specialists and doctors, it comes at a high cost for patients. It is time we saw this minister behave in a leadership role which seeks to resolve these issues, rather than blame shift. There is no evidence of a coordinated plan from the Labor government to address public specialist waiting times. In fact, the government hides this information, even through FOI mechanisms, and then asks us to trust its genuineness in resolving this issue.

I do not think a person who is slowly going blind waiting for a couple of years for an eye appointment in the public system would be particularly interested in hearing Queensland's Health Minister ranting and raving about the medical profession in a war of words, with little evidence of open and accountable systems to recruit staff to the public system. Recruitment takes cooperation on both sides of the argument and it also requires greater flexibility on behalf of government.

There are areas of shortages in certain specialties. One would imagine that this would mean that people qualified in areas of need who indicate that they are willing to work in the public system would be responded to more positively by the department when they do approach the public system and say that they want to conduct public sessions. Unfortunately, there is evidence that some very highly qualified people in those areas of need, willing to work in regional Queensland, have received the response from the Health Department: 'Sorry, we do not have the money.' Then the minister says that the department cannot get people to work in these areas.

The minister's flippant arrogance in responding to this crisis even extended to the point that she said these specialists only wanted to do private sessions. That is an insult, because it is calling these people liars, and it is arrogant. I am very disappointed to see this arrogance coming out at this early stage in the term of this government. This problem requires cooperation between the government and the medical fraternity. We should not have a situation of the minister blatantly misleading the House and not seeking to deal cooperatively to resolve these issues, in the best interests of people who are waiting far too long for access to specialist services.

I will mention one particular area, that is, vascular surgery. There was a vascular surgeon willing to work in the public system, but because the department was not necessarily advertising at that time in Townsville it did not employ him. Later on, when it did put an advertisement in the paper, that person was no longer available. It is this sort of inflexibility that is so frustrating.

I have talked with specialists in the Townsville area, and that is just an indication of what is happening in other parts of Queensland. They are often the best way to recruit. We have to work with people, rather than against them, and not abuse them. This is a case of finding the best way to treat patients. There are people who are literally dying on waiting lists because they cannot get timely access to specialist appointments and access to specialist follow-up to surgery or other procedures.

In the Townsville area the public system had the opportunity to employ people not only in the vascular surgery area but also in ENT, ophthalmology and neurosurgery. The neurosurgery example is an interesting one, because the department had the opportunity to employ a very highly qualified neurosurgeon in the Townsville area. But Townsville Hospital did not have any money and that person ended up heading up a section in a public hospital in Brisbane. This demonstrates once again the inability of the public system to respond to these opportunities.

When we have areas of need, we need to have flexibility so that when there are people available with very high qualifications, with needed expertise, we can give them work, give them public sessions. We should not say, 'Sorry, we do not have any money,' and then a few months down the track advertise the position and find that—shock, horror—we cannot fill it. It is this sort of ridiculous situation that is creating frustration out in the community, out in these areas that know they need access to this particular service.

It is time that the patients were listened to. While this Health Minister is having this public spat, there are people in areas such as the Sunshine Coast who have waited for two years just to see an ophthalmologist. When we raised this with the Health Minister, she would not publish any information. She will not be open and accountable. She will not publish the list. She will not say how many people are waiting for access to specialists, because that is the way this government has managed and controlled the system.

There needs to be a reconvening of the specialist forums. I am calling on the government to do that and to do that in a way that is open and accountable, with all the people at the table. That should be done in north Queensland, in central Queensland and in south Queensland. The government should get people at the table, get them talking and have an air of cooperation. It should make sure that there is a sharing of information and that there is honesty and accountability from the Health Department. I will be—

Time expired.
