



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 12 December 2001

CENSURE OF MINISTER FOR HEALTH

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.10 p.m.): I rise to second the motion. We are calling on the Minister for Health to resign over the disgraceful state of Queensland Health. In moving a censure motion against the minister, the opposition has provided ample material to prove that the minister is presiding over a health system in crisis. It is also a Health Department where staff morale is low and if anyone speaks out about issues of patient care because they are frustrated after going through the correct circles they are threatened with the code of conduct and even psychological testing or, in some of the worst vilification of a whistleblower that we have seen, they are defamed under parliamentary privilege by the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, herself.

For weeks now we have been seeing details of the problems in Queensland Health under this minister—problems that the minister continually blames solely upon a worldwide nursing shortage. This is not the case. In the last two months alone the opposition has focused on serious, inherent problems within Queensland Health—problems that have arisen as a result of the minister's inaction. In October the opposition raised in the House the serious problems of leukaemia sufferers being placed on waiting lists of up to six months for life-saving bone marrow transplants. At the time the minister hedged her bets by placing the blame on both clinical reasons and on a worldwide nursing shortage—a shortage that had been identified in 1999 but not addressed adequately by Minister Edmond at the time which led to shortages in this unit.

The opposition was then advised of an internal report into the workings of the bone marrow unit at the Royal Brisbane Hospital in Ward 9D which identified inherent problems of workplace harassment and inappropriate behaviour by one senior nurse. We raised this matter in the House and the minister claimed that she had not seen the report. This minister is so out of touch with her department that she had not even been advised of a report that identified serious operational issues within a particular unit. It was in trying to hose down the damage in the report that the minister outdid herself—under parliamentary privilege she personally attacked the whistleblower who had instigated the inquiry.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Maroochydore, I have already spoken about that matter. The member is not to refer to that whistleblowing incident. The matter is before a committee of this parliament.

Mr Horan: It is allowed in the motion, Mr Speaker.

Miss SIMPSON: It is in the motion. However, I want to talk about the culture of bullying in Queensland Health—a culture that is being not only condoned but also perpetrated by this Minister for Health. It is a serious issue, because when one sees that people who occupy positions as specialists and nurses in the public health system leave after only a matter of months one has to say that something is wrong, not only with the management but with staff morale. One cannot keep blaming everybody else. One has to look at the issues in the systems. When there is such lousy staff morale and issues to do with people being frustrated about not being able to speak out without being subjected to intimidation and bullying, there is something wrong. This government is putting up with it. It is condoning it. It is willing to defame people in order to protect its own hide.

Yesterday we heard the minister say that she was starting a new process of networking of hospitals with regard to intensive care. In layman's terms, the minister is shutting down the intensive care unit at the Logan Hospital and now all patients who need ICU care must transfer to the Princess Alexandra Hospital. Taking away an intensive care unit at a hospital like Logan, which caters for such a

large area, is just ministerial irresponsibility. I have publicly raised concerns about intensive care beds and closures in the last couple of years and more recently in March this year raised concerns about issues to do with bed-capping in neonatal units at the Mater with patients from the Gold Coast having to be bypassed to the Royal Women's Hospital when that unit was full. The minister is fairly cagey about whether there is a specialist shortage when confronted with stories of competent and respected specialists in the intensive care area leaving the public sector after only short periods of work. That was the case with Logan and today we heard more cases in relation to the Princess Alexandra Hospital.

But let us look at the situation with mental health. Here we have a clear example of this government failing to act. We moved amendments in debate on the Mental Health Bill that would have given some real teeth to provisions for victims of crime. There is clearly a problem when people who have committed serious and horrendous crimes are let back into the community within a matter of a few years. We proposed minimum periods of detention in treatment facilities set by the Mental Health Court, and this minister voted against it, as did other members of this House. They also voted against giving victims the right to know if the mental health offender who attacked them had escaped. They are not allowed to know that under that legislation. This government has done nothing to help them. The laws must be changed to bring about a situation where there is greater justice and appropriate treatment in such facilities. I have talked to the families of victims—

Time expired.
