



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

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Hansard 19 February 2002

PERFORMANCE OF MINISTER FOR HEALTH

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.09 p.m.): The Premier is failing in his leadership to act against Health Minister Wendy Edmond, whose mismanagement is threatening patient and public safety. When Premier Peter Beattie proclaims her as the best Health Minister ever, his own backbench and some of his frontbench cringe in disbelief, and the Premier's credibility is sullied. Caring for the sick and vulnerable in this state is not a joke. It is time to take action and put a competent and honest minister in charge of this portfolio.

Staff in Queensland Health wonder if this critical portfolio is of such little importance to state Labor that Mrs Edmond's incompetence and bungling continues to be tolerated rather than decisive action being taken to put a more capable person in that position. At least some of the Premier's backbenchers are showing enough guts to speak up, with Desley Boyle last week challenging the Health Minister to address the Cairns Hospital situation after constant denials from Mrs Edmond that anything was wrong. The Cairns debacle, with a lack of staffing and beds, cannot be ignored. The opposition initiated calls for an independent review to establish the resources that are required. However, I believe that top-heavy bureaucracy—at the expense of clinical staff—and poor management is ripping the guts out of this and many other hospitals.

Recently, the beautiful new Townsville Hospital opened with great fanfare. However, the complaints and concerns emanating from this major city and surrounding districts about a chronic lack of staff, unacceptable waiting times and, incredibly, a lack of beds to cater for demand in a brand-new hospital just cannot be ignored. But once again the Health Minister is tardy and missing in action when these issues come to the fore.

Then there is the debacle of the lack of obstetrics cover for Maryborough, where mums cannot deliver their babies on weekends. The minister again is absent in action in regard to this critical issue. The Beaudesert Hospital is a beautiful new hospital, as my colleague the member for Beaudesert would know, yet this government has allowed an outflow of staff and a situation to develop such that hundreds of babies cannot be born at that hospital because the government has not provided coverage. That was supposed to be fixed at Christmas time and it has not happened.

This morning we heard the Minister for Health, Mrs Edmond, being flippant and dismissive about the approach to notification of victims about the movements of mentally ill offenders. This morning the minister misled the House. Notification orders in respect of which victims have to apply to be notified under the Mental Health Act do not cover situations such as escapes. This is not covered in the new legislation. The opposition sought to amend the act to mirror the provisions available to victims of crimes by the non-mentally ill, yet this government, the Health Minister and the Premier voted against that. Today she is talking about a register, yet that is not something that is in the legislation. It does not require the department or the Health Minister, directed by the victims when they put in a notification order, to deliver on that.

Clearly, this minister is a disgrace and has let down the victims of crime. They also voted against minimum sentences in a secure facility for those mentally ill offenders who have committed very serious crimes. The minister claims that the new bill will address issues of public safety, but she will not give a guarantee that absconding mental health offenders will not kill or hurt someone again.

In addition to the raft of abuses occurring in the mental health system, last year we saw the example of how in relation to Claude John Gabriel the department, under this minister, failed to notify

the victims and their families of his release. The media notified the family before the department got around to doing so. Under this minister, the handling of these situations has been disgraceful, with delays in agreed extradition procedures between states.

Three people from the Nambour Hospital died after walking out of its mental health facility. I know at least one of those people was regulated. Two went under trains. There are people who need assistance with mental health. I have spoken with the mum of one of those young victims. Tragically, the mental health system is failing patients, the wider community and the staff, who are saying that there is a mixture of violent and non-violent patients in inappropriately resourced situations where there are not trained psychiatric nurses to look after them. That is letting down people who are vulnerable and in need of mental health assistance. It is letting down the wider community, who expect public safety and public health to be dealt with. This minister is missing in action. She touts that the new bill will deal with this. I have talked to staff. They are distressed about the lack of resources that is resulting in these abuses.
