



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 3 September 2002

QUEENSLAND HEALTH

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.02 p.m.): On 22 August 2002 the *Townsville Bulletin* published a cartoon which sums up the health crisis and which galvanises Wendy Edmond's hold on the title of Queensland's worst ever health minister. To highlight this point I take this time to indulge parliament about north Queensland's perception of Mrs Edmond. Under a headline that reads 'Cancer queue' sits a cartoon titled 'Overprescribing'. The man on the right represents the health system. Mrs Edmond hands him a jar of excuses with the advice, 'Take one of these and call me in a few months.' He asks, 'Will that cure me?' and she replies, 'No, but it will make me feel better.' I have no doubt that Mrs Edmond's many pro forma excuses do make her feel better. They are all pretty memorable. 'Nurses are to blame,' according to the minister, 'Doctors are to blame,' and in response to a person dying on the waiting list, 'It's not a perfect world.' I would like to point out to the Health Minister that the lack of GPs and the reduction in bulk billing does not explain why people are waiting for excessive times in the emergency department at Townsville Hospital for admission to a hospital bed when the hospital is full. GPs do not have hospital beds in their surgeries.

As widely publicised today from leaked documents to the state opposition, the Beattie government has been hiding important facts from the Townsville people, which continued today when the minister refused this morning to tell the parliament how much Townsville Hospital's budget had blown out and why its medical and surgical departments have been asked to cut spending by five per cent. I still have not received an answer from the minister. Perhaps the minister has run out of excuses. The people of north Queensland deserve an answer, and I urge the minister to provide one.

When the *Courier-Mail* reported last month that the minister was failing to answer questions in parliament, Premier Peter Beattie said the minister was under enormous pressure and had had a rough time. Poor Minister Wendy! What sort of pressure does she think the public hospital system is under? What about the patients who are dying because of her negligence? I am sorry, but the minister cannot expect the Queensland people to have sympathy for her when she clearly has none for them.

I will table documents indicating that since January last year patients have been forced to wait eight hours or longer in the hospital's emergency department at Townsville General for admission to a bed. By February this year, more than half of emergency admissions were forced to wait more than eight hours for admission to a bed. Figures also reveal that 1.3 per cent of patients waited longer than a day. In 1999 only 0.1 per cent waited that long. This is a sign that something is drastically wrong and it is only now that Mrs Edmond has had to face the people she has been neglecting for so long that she is willing to dip into the Treasury coffers for the north.

Is the minister aware of what emergency departments are for? A category 1 patient must be seen immediately. Townsville General Hospital has been achieving that target. A category 2 patient must be seen within 10 minutes; category 3, within 30 minutes; category 4, within 60 minutes; and category 5, within 120 minutes. Many patients who come to emergency departments, not surprisingly, are emergencies, despite what the minister tells the parliament. They cannot afford to wait eight hours further for a bed.

Let us have a look at the figures in the documents. As I mentioned, Townsville General Hospital is meeting the standard for category 1 urgent cases. But what about category 2 patients, or people who should be seen within 10 minutes? As at 2 July 2000, 90 per cent of those patients were seen within time. As at February 2002, this year, 68.7 per cent were seen within time. That is a dramatic fall-off. Let us look at category 3, or patients who are supposed to be seen within 30 minutes. These are people with urgent needs. They are not people with stubbed toes. What did we see? As at July 2000, 80 per cent had been seen within that time frame. As at February of this year, only 55 per cent had been seen within that time frame. These are emergency patients who have gone to the emergency department at the Townsville Hospital for treatment. They should not be treated as if they are somehow the fault of the GPs in the local area when patients need hospital beds and treatment. I hear of victims of the Health Minister's mismanagement of the Queensland Health system on a daily basis. One of the most tragic was the story of Brian Bradford, who died of a heart attack 20 days—

Time expired.