



Speech by

CHRIS FOLEY

Member for MARYBOROUGH

Hansard 15 October 2003

HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CHRIS FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (4.31 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Health Legislation Amendment Bill which, for the most part, I agree with and think is good legislation. It seems a little ironic at times that when public health services are strained to the limit we actually have a bill before the House that narrows the framework of what is defined as a health professional. I have no problem or disagreement with that. It also adds a significant degree of legitimacy to parahealth professionals such as dental hygienists and others.

One of the interesting things about being a new member of parliament is that you end up totally confused, because one of the main games in the House seems to be to blame the feds for everything that goes wrong. We see more passes than in the Rugby World Cup at times! Yet the feds and the states seem to blame each other for the clear crisis that the health system is in, but again it is all about money.

Let us look at the difference between a chiropractor and an osteopath. Most honourable members of the House will be aware that chiropractic as a discipline came from the previous discipline of osteopathy, which involves a significant amount of deep tissue massage before doing a manipulation. Therefore, it could be argued that osteopaths are chiropractors but that chiropractors are not necessarily osteopaths. That may sound like it has nothing to do with the bill, but members should look at the licensing for these areas. I have an osteopath in my town of Maryborough who complains quite vigorously about all of the separate licensing fees that he is already required to pay when he already has those skills and has proved time and time again that he is qualified to practise.

I notice that the member for Indooroopilly remarked on the fact that in his electorate the level of bulk-billing has fallen from around 75 per cent or 70 per cent down to 50.1 per cent. We would be thrilled with that in Maryborough because our bulk-billing is more like 30 per cent than 50 per cent. That is a real problem for poor families who cannot get to see a doctor. Most good doctors in Maryborough reserve the right for their low income—

Mrs Edmond: Have you raised it with your local federal member?

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: No, not yet, but I might do that. For many doctors who do not participate formally in bulk-billing, there are still many doctors in Maryborough who still bulk-bill their patients who are of a lower socio-economic nature. In fact, one very cluey constituent of mine suggested that as there is some spare space at Maryborough Hospital perhaps that could be used to set up a free clinic. In other words, the doctors who could be attracted to work at that clinic would only bulk-bill in return for having that space provided for them for free. I realise there would be all sorts of—

Mrs Edmond: You are not allowed to under the health regulations.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: Yes. I was going to say that I realise that occupational health and safety issues would rule that out.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: Yes, but it is at least a novel idea and is thinking outside the loop. At Maryborough Hospital I have a very good working relationship with Michael Allsop, who is the manager. We work together to work through complaints. Obviously any health service in Queensland receives a great number of complaints of that nature. One of the jobs of a local member is to work through those.

In relation to dental therapists and dental hygienists, I applaud this legislation and the minister for thinking outside the loop in trying to use paraprofessionals—although they are professionals in their own right—to provide services that can easily be done. That will help to bring down the workload on dentists themselves.

The American experience is somewhat different in that they have a number of barefoot doctors. I have some American friends who tell me that when they go to see their medical practice they rarely see the doctor but instead see the doctor's assistant. I have been having some extensive discussions with Dr Paul Cotton, who is a good friend of mine and who is the chairman of the Fraser District Health Service. He has been working on a pilot program to deliver health services to the Biggenden area in conjunction with a local health practice. I applaud all the initiatives to think outside the loop. I look forward to when other professionals can be trained to do some of the jobs which do not necessarily require a qualified medical practitioner. Forward thinking in that regard is always a welcome thing. Other than that, I have no particular problem with the bill and would seek to endorse it and vote on it in the House.