



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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SURGICAL WAITING LISTS, QUEENSLAND HEALTH

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.11 p.m.): According to Queensland Health's own figures, less surgery per year took place under the Beattie government than during the reign of the Borbidge government. In the 1997-98 year, more than 600,000 surgical procedures took place, yet in 2002 this fell to 586,000. It is well documented that one of the major issues concerning the Queensland populace is lengthy surgical waiting lists. Latest Queensland Health figures indicate that 11,000 Queensland patients are overdue for elective surgery. 9,000 of those waited more than a year. This is clearly unacceptable. But Health Minister Wendy Edmond will not even admit there is a problem, despite having the gall to criticise the federal government which is actually trying to fix the problems within its realm of influence.

Health is a problem in Queensland and the figures show that Queensland is going backwards. The state Health Minister's solution to bringing down waiting lists is to stop more people from going on the list. Many of Queensland's sick and elderly are waiting years for appointments with specialists. That is Queensland's hidden waiting list, which is much more extensive than what the Health Minister would have us believe. In the Health Smart State 2020 document it was suggested that there should be fewer specialist clinics because they encourage unrealistic expectations that patients would not receive treatment. This is where it is outrageous, because there are people who are waiting to get on a waiting list. The hidden problem with people being unable to get a timely appointment with a specialist means that they are being gate kept; in other words, they are being kept out of the official figures for surgery. If the media did not report on the numerous people who have had difficulty getting medical attention in the public system regardless of their condition the Beattie government would not bother doing anything to help them.

The minister repeatedly criticises the opposition for making the issues public. In many of these cases these people—these patients—cannot wait a month for the Health Minister to return our letters. Like the Sunshine Coast lady who had a deadly aneurism on her brain, or the Rockhampton gentleman who had been told he could not be seen within the estimated time he had left to live, or the Mackay lady whose husband died while on a waiting list for angiogram. These people cannot wait. There are many other people who fall through the cracks. This is the human face of the Queensland Health crisis and yet the state Health Minister pretends that there is not a problem.

The Queensland coalition recognises the problem and is developing a multifaceted policy to reduce elective surgery waiting lists. We are also looking at how we reduce the outpatient specialist wait times, because this is a critical factor to people receiving timely and appropriate treatment. Earlier, I tabled documents revealing the proposal by Queensland Health to close the Princess Alexandra Hospital Gynaecology Unit. More than 700 gynaecology patients in Queensland are already overdue for surgery. So what does the Health Minister do? She decides to shut down another facility despite protests from the PA Hospital's senior specialist staff association.

Mrs Edmond admits to a plan to actually exacerbate wait times rather than improve them. Right now the wait times must be improved. The state Health Minister must get serious about bringing down hospital wait times. If she is not prepared to do that, she should not be in the job. Not only does this state government seem unprepared to do anything, it is actually working to increase wait times. No longer will the coalition accuse the Beattie government of sitting on its hands; the Beattie government is actually working to make the public health system worse for Queenslanders.

I know the role of Health Minister is a difficult one. It is an extremely important one which must be tackled head on. But this state Health Minister hides behind the director-general or district managers of hospitals every time something goes wrong. Today I issue a challenge to the state Health Minister to be the Health spokesperson for the Beattie government. If she is not willing to stop plans which increase the waiting times for elective surgery, she could at least be made to explain to the public why she is allowing wait times to spiral out of control even further. I implore her to perform her role and actually answer people's questions about elective surgery waiting times or emergency department waiting times. I issue that challenge to Mrs Edmond. It is really the very least she can do.