



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.12 p.m.): Women's health services are being compromised by dud decision making from the state Health Minister. The closure of the gynaecology unit at Princess Alexandra Hospital from 31 December is a dangerous downgrade in the hospital's services—a hospital which is a major teaching facility with one of the largest emergency departments in Australia. From the end of this year, that unit, which has been progressively and deliberately downgraded, with staff vacancies not advertised and filled, will close completely. The remaining specialists have bluntly been told to shift to QEII or resign—all this at a time when the state Labor government has a record receipt in stamp duty, land tax and a windfall of about \$250 million in GST revenues alone over and above its anticipated GST receipts. We have to ask: where does Labor spend the money? It is good at spending it on the Premier's PR machine and not good at spending it on clinical services.

This closure is not a decision based on good care of women; it is a plan designed by bureaucrats with Health Minister Edmond's blessing. PA's service has been steadily downgraded from having continual specialist gynae coverage to an outsource service which ignores its role as not just a centre for elective work but, most importantly, emergency medicine. The lame and dangerous justification from the Beattie Labor government that these patients should not be presenting at this major tertiary hospital and that they should only go to the Mater and the QEII hospitals is a nice theory that does not work in practice.

In the real world, women with ectopic pregnancies and other gynae issues arrive by ambulance and car at the emergency department of the PA as one of Australia's largest emergency departments and also as a tertiary level hospital. In the real world, patients, even gynae patients, are frequently put on bypass from the QEII and the Mater and sent to the PA due to a lack of beds or, as they call it, 'access block'. The times that it takes to admit patients to a bed at the Mater and the QEII are some of the worst in the state. Senior medical staff at the Princess Alexandra Hospital have strongly criticised the government's moves to downgrade and then close their hospital's gynae unit. In a postal survey, 102 out of 104 responding senior medical staff wanted the gynaecological unit to stay. Their views as clinicians have been ignored. No doubt the Health Minister will try personal vilification of those who speak out against this closure.

It is the patients who pay the ultimate price of this downgrade. In the last couple of weeks a Mater patient who was 19 weeks pregnant and bleeding was turned away en route to the Mater. This is not a criticism of the staff in the system; it is a criticism of the funding under this government to the coalface of Health, despite the record GST receipts. Despite that, we see them making decisions which are detrimental to patients.

Staff speaking on behalf of those patients say they do not agree that the alternative system outsourced to the QEII Hospital—no longer part of PA staffing—will guarantee gynae patients the access they need. Furthermore, providing appropriate services at the QEII Hospital should not be achieved by destroying the services of a major teaching hospital such as the PA.

I table a petition of 1,570 concerned Queenslanders, mainly from north Queensland, who question the state government's threat to reject the extra \$2.1 billion from the federal government in the latest Australian Health Care Agreement. They want the state government to fix the problems in our public hospitals and to address waiting lists and delays in the state public hospitals. The Federal Health Care Agreement delivers additional funds to Queensland, not less money. The previous Queensland agreement provided \$5.9 billion, and this latest agreement adds \$2.1 billion over and above the previous agreement. The Labor state government in Queensland now has a record windfall of \$250 million in GST receipts over and above what it was expecting to receive, and yet Queenslanders are waiting longer to get access even to a specialist appointment.