



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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### **RURAL HEALTH SERVICES**

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (10.55 p.m.): I would like to provide the parliament with an update on some health issues in my electorate of Warrego. Public liability insurance for doctors is a big issue and has to be finally resolved. Much work has been done over the past couple of weeks by Dr Bill Glasson and the Minister for Health, Tony Abbott, and a moratorium is now in place until a final solution is reached. However, uncertainty is still out there.

Doctors in communities in rural areas are facing many difficult issues, such as not enough general practitioners in most towns; specialist doctors are having difficulty in having time off; locums are very expensive; waiting times are increasing for basic and specialist care; and we need more incentives for rural doctors.

The Patient Travel Scheme has run off the rails. In one case a constituent of mine saw a private doctor who referred the patient to a specialist in Toowoomba. The private doctor completed the patient travel form, the constituent then went to the hospital to have the form signed off by the medical superintendent, and he was told that he had to wait for an appointment to see another hospital doctor. How ridiculous can we get? When I eventually got a response back from the people concerned, I was told—

I have been advised by the Medical Superintendent ... that the process for Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme is that the patient, if attending a local private doctor, needs to have a PTSS form completed and signed by their referring doctor. The patient then has to present the PTSS form to the local public hospital to be processed and approved by the Medical Superintendent or Senior Medical Officer. This is required to ensure that the PTSS form has been completed appropriately ... all relevant details are completed and correct entitlements are approved as per Queensland Health guidelines for PTSS, that is, travel, accommodation and escort remuneration.

How ridiculous can we get?

Another important issue concerns Health positions in the St George community. A letter outlining the situation states—

The St George community is currently suffering from a distinct lack of health services that is proving extremely significant for the community ...

... at St George, we have either lost or not had

- a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Worker. This position has been vacant since March of 2002;
- An Adult Mental Health Worker since mid-May of 2003;
- A Social Worker since December 2002;
- A Mental Health Promotion Officer ... ; and
- An Occupational Therapist.

The St George community does have some positions which can assist in the area that these people work, (Sport & Rec Officer, Youth Worker, PLOs and a Balonne Youth Initiative program) but the skills that these health workers bring to a community are priceless.

...

It astounds me that positions such as these can remain unfilled for such a length of time when youth suicide is on the rise and the greater percentage of these tragedies occur in rural areas.

I write not only to inform of the situation but to make authorities aware that the backlog of vacant positions is impacting on our community. These are children who are missing out on much needed assistance and/or guidance.