



Speech by

JOHN ENGLISH

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

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HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (6.46 p.m.): I have seen the amendment moved by Mrs Sheldon and I would like to comment on the three points raised in it. Point 1 calls on the Beattie government to table its emergency department plan for Queensland. This government has already made our plans very clear. Point 2 asks us to fund increased staff numbers. What can I say? This government has already delivered. We have already done that. In point 3 Mrs Sheldon has asked that we address the growing crisis in the state's Ambulance Service. The minister has already addressed this furphy in his speech.

The opposition is blatantly wrong when it says that this government has not addressed the proper resourcing of emergency departments in our hospitals. The facts speak for themselves. The Beattie Labor government is delivering on its election commitment to fund extra staff, services and equipment for our public hospital and emergency departments right across the state. In 1998-99 this government implemented the emergency services strategy to improve waiting times in emergency departments and funded an additional 17 medical and 11 nursing positions across Queensland emergency departments. We have provided more doctors and nurses, more equipment, modern emergency department information systems and specialist enhanced training for nurses, and we have funded a range of projects to improve services.

Since 1998 the Beattie Labor government has completed 24 new emergency departments and refurbished nine right across the state. In 2002-03 this government allocated recurrent funding for an additional 16 doctors and two nurses in Queensland's busiest emergency departments. This funding meant new staff were able to be employed as follows: at Townsville, an extra three medical officers; at the Redcliffe-Caboolture Hospital, four additional medical officers; at Royal Children's, one medical officer; at the Logan Hospital—relevant to my electorate—five additional medical officers; and on the Gold Coast, three medical officers and two more nurses.

This is on top of extra funding provided to high-growth areas such as the Sunshine Coast, where Nambour Hospital's emergency department has increased its number of medical staff from six to 11 and extra nursing positions have been appointed. We have doubled the number of doctors in Caloundra Hospital's emergency department from four to eight. Just last week the government announced a \$13.5 million commitment to upgrade the Redcliffe Hospital's emergency and specialist outpatients departments. I was particularly pleased with the announcement just a few days prior of a \$4.2 million commitment for a major expansion at the Redland Hospital's emergency department. The Redlands is one of the highest growth regions of the state, and the government has recognised the service pressures that are a result of this growth. For the same reason, \$8 million has been allocated for the opening of new 30-bed wards next year at the Logan and Caboolture hospitals to help meet demand in these rapidly growing regions.

Queensland Health has now established an emergency department reform group to progress further service improvements in emergency departments. On board are the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine and the College of Emergency Nursing. As the minister has said, the coalition government did not collect statewide data for emergency departments, just as it refused to publish waiting times for elective surgery. It oiled the squeakiest wheel, whereas this government has the backup data to address pressure points in the system.

There is a lot of nonsense talked by the opposition health spokesperson on emergency departments. The bottom line is that 99.9 per cent of the most urgent cases are seen immediately by a doctor. What the opposition spokesperson fails to grasp is that the time between when a person presents at an emergency department and their admission—if this is required—may well include a whole range of treatments, including X-rays and blood tests. As the House has heard beyond doubt this evening, Queensland emergency departments are the best in Australia.