



Speech by

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Member for MOUNT OMMANEY

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (12.36 p.m.): I fully support this legislation, which amends 11 various Health portfolio acts to provide greater and improved protection for ordinary Queenslanders obtaining health services. I would also like to acknowledge Leonie Short, former member for Ryan, President of the Labor Women's Association and also dental therapist, who has a special interest in this bill and who is in the gallery here today.

The Beattie government and the Minister for Health are committed to ensuring that health care is provided to all Queenslanders at the highest possible standard while enhancing the protection afforded to them. Queenslanders seeking health services have consumer protection through health practitioner registration, the regulation of professional conduct and possible punitive actions against health practitioners under various state and Commonwealth acts. The range of consumer protections contained in existing legislation means that the requirement for certain health professionals to be registered provides a highly effective means of protecting the interests of the public, addressing information available to consumers and ensuring that practitioners hold professional standards.

I would like to concentrate my comments on this bill on those amendments that involve dentistry. There are quite a number of dental practices in Mount Ommaney and with over 100 dentists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, dental technicians, dental nurses and orthodontists living in my electorate, interest in this bill is high.

In accordance with national competition policy, a review of restricted core practices was established to examine potentially anti-competitive and statutory practice restrictions within certain facets of the health industry. This bill implements recommendations from the NCP review of restrictions in the practice of dentistry involving the Dental Practitioners Registration Act 2001, the Dental Practitioners Registration Regulation 2001, the Dental Technicians and Dental Prosthetists Registration Act 2001 and the Health Practitioners (Professional Standards) Act 1999.

The bill's amendments will retain a statutory definition of dentistry to capture only those facets of the practice that pose a high risk of harm to patients. It will continue to restrict the types of people who may practise dentistry, namely registered dentists, dentist specialists and medical practitioners, and the extent to which their duties fall within the definition of dentistry, registered dental prosthetists and allied oral health professionals, dental hygienists and dental therapists. It will retain a simplified statutory definition of dental prosthetists' work.

It will restrict the provision of dental prosthesis services to dental prosthetists, dentists and medical practitioners, retain the current restriction on the provision of partial dentures to dental prosthetists, provide for the registration of allied oral health professionals by the Dental Board of Queensland, remove the restriction on the employment of dental therapists to the public sector, remove the requirement for dental hygienists to work in a one-to-one ratio with a dentist, and enable the Dental Board to authorise a dental therapist under the supervision of a dentist to perform additional functions if the therapist has the necessary qualifications or skills.

The review of restricted core practices identified procedures that pose a high risk of harm to dental patients. Those high-risk dental procedures are restricted to qualified practitioners in order to protect consumers. These restricted practices include the diagnosis of conditions of the mouth, the fitting or adjustment of artificial teeth or corrective dental appliances such as braces, and irreversible and exposure-prone procedures such as extracting a molar, cutting a person's gum to remove a tooth

or providing a filling. Unregistered or unauthorised persons who seek to perform a restricted practice will commit an offence, as will persons holding themselves out to be registered when they are not. Title restrictions prevent a non-registrant from using a professional title.

Dental therapists and dental hygienists have long been a vital component of Queensland's rural and urban dental line-up, providing valuable public services. This bill provides for registration of dental therapists and dental hygienists to bring them within the scope of the general requirements of the Dental Practitioners Registration Act 2001. The amendments also provide for the appointment of a dental therapist and a dental hygienist to the Dental Board and provide for their representation on professional panels convened to determine a disciplinary or health assessment matter involving another allied oral health professional.

As I said earlier, the bill removes the restrictions which limit dental therapists to employment in the public sector. It also removes the requirement for dental hygienists to work in a one-to-one ratio with a dentist. When the bill is passed it will be possible to see a dentist and two or more therapists when they visit a nursing home to expedite consultations and provide greater levels of service.

A simplified definition of dental prosthesis work is provided, and the bill restricts the provision of dental prosthetic services to dental prosthetists, dentists and medical practitioners. It will retain the current restriction on the provision of partial dentures by dental prosthetists. The amendments will also remove the restrictions on the performance of dental technical work by dental technicians. The removal of this restriction will enable dentists, dental prosthetists and dental technicians to employ staff who are not necessarily fully trained dental technicians to undertake unskilled technical work. I am not aware of any issues involved with this in other jurisdictions and am confident that it will work well here. I congratulate the minister and her department for their efforts in producing these much-needed amendments during such trying times, and I commend the bill to the House.