



Speech by

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HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (6.50 p.m.): From the outset, I have to say what a breathtaking array of ignorance from the opposition. It would know that the Beattie government has an impressive record when it comes to emergency departments, especially in terms of quality and timeliness, and yet it peddles out this misinformation on a regular basis. Can I say straight up that it is due to the fantastic, dedicated staff from the leading emergency departments, doctors and nurses to the dependable administrative staff that Queensland Health has as a world-class system. It is one that I am constantly told is envied across the world.

Why does the opposition constantly want to lower staff morale in our hospitals, using anecdotal evidence that does nothing but lower morale? In Townsville, as has been spoken about tonight, we have world-class facilities—unrecognised by the opposition—in the \$182 million Douglas Hospital, and we have provided additional funding for emergency department staff to help meet the increased demand.

I finally get it. I understand the mover's constant, shrill carping about emergency department figures. You know why? She does not understand them. She does not get them. She is a peddler of fear, of misinformation, of sensationalism, and she is scaring staff away. How are we ever going to attract specialists to our hospitals from other parts of Australia and other parts of the world when those opposite continue to peddle this misinformation? How can she consistently get it wrong? What really upsets me is that she continually makes political mileage out of people's ill health and their pain.

Dr Lesley Clark: Shame!

Ms NELSON-CARR: It is a shameful situation. They are already fearful, they are already needing hospital treatment, and they go on with this rubbish from the other side. This parliament acknowledges that official figures show 99.9 per cent of the most urgent emergency patients arriving in our accident and emergency departments are seen immediately by a doctor and that 77 per cent of category 2 emergency patients are seen within the national target of 10 minutes of arriving at an emergency department.

The news is even better in Townsville. Our figures are better than the state average for category 1 and category 2 emergency department cases at 100 per cent and 89 per cent respectively. This is a tremendous performance by our public hospital emergency departments, especially given the demands placed on them by increasing attendances of GP type patients because of failed federal government health policies. In Queensland we know how long patients are waiting. We know what acuity they are and that 60 per cent of patients in our emergency departments are categories 4 and 5, which are GP type patients as opposed to patients requiring emergency treatment.

Guess what? This never happened under the opposition. We have no idea how many people waited or how long they waited in emergency departments because the information was never collected. In addition, we know the coalition refused to publish elective surgery waiting lists, which the Beattie government puts on the Queensland Health web site each quarter. While clearly we are seeing the most urgent cases in a timely manner, I can assure the House that the minister and her department continue to strive to improve waiting times for other categories.

The Beattie Labor government has a demonstrated commitment to a public health care system built on the principles of universality and equity of access according to need and not according to ability to pay. If the opposition is serious about health, I too call on it to join with the Premier in bipartisan talks

with the Prime Minister and other state leaders in implementing the recommendations of 250 independent health experts who, after examining the Australian health system at the Australian Health Care Summit earlier this year, reported that urgent reform is possible, affordable and essential.

I call on the opposition to demand that the Howard government return the billion dollars that it has taken away from the public hospitals. I also call on it to put in writing this anecdotal evidence that it peddles, this misinformation that it continues to peddle in frightening public patients away from our public hospitals.