



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND OTHER DRUG SERVICES

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (5.39 p.m.): I rise to speak about a problem at the Toowoomba Base Hospital in the provision of services for those who are affected by alcohol and other drugs. There is a unit there called ATODS—Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Services—which has for many years provided a wonderful service. Over the recent years of Labor government we have seen the funding and resources provided to ATODS gradually decline. It is an area of great need.

I was advised recently of a mother who wished to have her user son registered on the methadone program as he needed help, and needed help urgently. She was told this was not possible until 19 March 2004 as there was no longer a weekend program or a doctor on duty at the weekend who could provide that particular assistance. It has been proven that at night, on weekends and at Christmas time are the times when users are at their most vulnerable and desperate point and they cry for help, and if none is available many can resort to suicide. We had a tragic episode of that at the hospital. It is not the fault of the staff because they are working themselves to the bone in an endeavour to provide this help. They just simply do not have the resources or the systems any longer to provide the sort of care that they used to be able to provide.

Admission for medical detoxing is now through the accident and emergency department, and they only admit for medical detoxing on Mondays and only then if complications are demonstrated. Patients then have to be sent to Brisbane because there are no public detox beds any longer at the Toowoomba Hospital. When this happened recently and two persons were referred to Brisbane, only one was admitted in Brisbane and the other was told there were no beds for him and he would have to return home. The ATODS staff are doing all they can, but funding is inadequate for existing programs for users, for counselling for parents, for partners and families of users.

We hear a lot about extra money that is going to health, and there are a number of areas of the health system that do need support. I would like to see a portion of this extra money that is promised to Toowoomba provided for this service at our hospital because we are a major regional centre serving the vast areas of south-western Queensland. It is not just for Toowoomba but all the people of the south-west, the Lockyer and the South Burnett. These people, when in desperate need, need help.

We have seen examples in recent years of the rehabilitation and medical beds for the elderly being gradually cut back at the hospital to the point where there is never enough to service the needs. Recently during heatwave conditions we had the problem of no airconditioning in the day ward for people who were receiving cancer treatment. I spoke up about it through the media and fortunately virtually within two days some airconditioning was put into that hospital. We desperately need to have MRI facilities at our hospital because it is a major hospital servicing so many people. I call on the new Health Minister to hear what I have said tonight and to ensure that the ATODS section, rehabilitation and medical areas and our MRI facilities receive appropriate funding.

Time expired.