



Speech by

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FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION AND AUDIT (PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF HEALTH DEPARTMENT) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (9.52 p.m.) This particular private member's bill is an opportunity for this parliament to bring some real accountability to a department that consumes one of the largest percentages of funds out of our annual budget. Not only is it a fact that some 22 per cent to 25 per cent of the annual state budget goes to health but, and more importantly, this bill is about the on-the-ground personal care, the number of operations performed, the waiting lists, the effectiveness of public health programs, and so forth, which can be monitored and in which the public and this parliament would have enormous interest.

During this debate and in an earlier debate, the Minister for Health spoke about all the various auditing systems that are available. Many of them are research type auditing that give an indication of trends and how Queensland is going compared to other states and so forth. But we are about a real performance audit. If people are running a business, they want to know exactly how their money was spent, how effectively it was being spent and what type of return they were getting for that business and how successful it was. This is even more important because it is dealing with people's health and their lives. We want to know that the massive amount of money that is provided by the state for health services is being spent to its utmost and that we are getting the greatest value that we possibly can and treating as many people as we can or preventing as much disease and illness as we possibly can.

Back in 1996 before the system of surgery on time was introduced—and I had the honour of being involved in that—there was no proper accountable system for knowing how many people were waiting for elective surgery other than the huge public outcry and clamour of those people who were waiting for elective surgery. We put in place a system that had category 1, category 2 and category 3 and set about the task of publishing that data for the 10 major hospitals that undertook well over 90 per cent of all elective surgery in Queensland. By putting it into categories and setting targets for the particular categories, it provided a real target and a real incentive for staff.

The amazing thing that came out of that was the absolute talent that resided within the Health Department—within the hospitals, the theatre nurses who came forward with ideas and the way in which the whole planning committee involving nurses, doctors, theatre staff and administrative assistants from hospitals were able to sit down together and determine how to undertake more operations. They looked at issues such as pre-operative care. Instead of people taking up hospital beds for two or three days before an operation, they managed that better so that people came in on a day basis. They had been prepped in the days before that on an outpatient basis and were able to come in and not take up a hospital bed. There was greater efficiency in the use of theatres so that in the four-hour theatre blocks more operations were able to take place to make better use of the available medical staff and surgeons and so forth. Then recovery was also a part of that whole program.

By putting that into effect, in the two years we were in government there were 13,000 more operations than in the two years before—almost, you might say, with the same staff. We invested more money and improved the systems, but it all came back to the original targets and the scrutiny that we

placed ourselves under by creating category 1, category 2 and category 3. Category 1 had to have 95 per cent of operations performed within a particular time, category 2 within a set time and so on. We set about achieving and publicising those particular targets.

It is difficult and you put your head on the chopping block somewhat when you go public with figures that you want to attempt to reach or meet. However, I think that that is what we have to do, and do it within reason. We have to put forward reasonable targets—targets that are not outlandish—that can be achieved with the staff or perhaps with modest increases to staff to increase efficiency levels. We have to have targets and we have to have an auditing system whereby there can be independent auditing.

I have thought about this matter long and hard because of the time that I was involved in that particular role. I believe that independent auditing can provide public confidence in what is happening. It can provide the staff of Queensland Health with the knowledge that the government of the day is fair dinkum and that there is every endeavour to use the precious health dollars to their very, very best.

We often hear people say blandly, 'Oh, there are too many bureaucrats in Health' and this, that and the other. We all go through that particular period. When you get in there you need a certain amount of administration because to handle \$5 billion a year, to provide health services to millions and millions of outpatients and inpatients a year, to have some 55,000 to 60,000 full-time equivalent staff and to run 160 hospitals and 600 other clinics and centres and so forth across the length and breadth of the state, you have to have some degree of management and administration. However, if we have an auditing system, we can start to see whether our ideals and the strategic plans are coming down to full value in patient services. A lot of charities that seek donations and sponsorships will say that 92c in the dollar of the money that they receive actually goes to providing the charity or service and only eight cents in the dollar goes to administration. That gives people who donate strongly to those organisations the confidence that the vast bulk of that money will go into services. That is where an independent system of auditing can be of great value to Queensland Health, to the staff, and to the government of the day. It can engender public confidence that the government is spending the money wisely and well.

Tonight we had the launch of a strategic plan by Queensland Health. We see governments change, we see ministers change and we see strategic plans. I would say to the minister sitting opposite that I hope that everything he had planned in the strategic plan will work, particularly for the benefit of patients and the loyal staff.

If the government is going to go out and say that it wants to reduce the incidence of diabetes and reduce the incidence of obesity in our young, that it wants to do more elective surgery and decrease breast cancer because it is preventable and because stroke and heart disease in women is preventable, then it has to set some targets so there is something concrete and dynamic to achieve. There has to be faith and confidence in the government's ability and leadership and in the ability of the staff to say that it is prepared to submit to an independent audit. Once this is achieved we can say that it was not just words. We can say that there is a 22 per cent diabetes rate in the state and the government wants to reduce it to 18 per cent or 17 per cent and there will be an independent auditing so there is scrutiny and honesty in terms of this whole plan. People will then know that it is not just a wonderful video or, as a former footballer, not just hype in the shed before going out to play the game—that is, people will know that the government can actually perform.

This bill has real merit. We could well say that governments and oppositions in election mode say these things about an audit. An audit could be good for a party that is in opposition because it gives a chance for scrutiny. I believe that this is about modern government lifting itself to a new level of performance.

In this parliament and the last parliament we all talked about accountability and performance and the responsibility that we have for the vast amount of taxpayers' money that ultimately we are responsible for. But, more importantly, the greater responsibility is seeing that services like health, road safety, emergency services and so on are funded as well as we possibly can with the piece of cake that we have to cut up. In modern business and modern government, in accountable government and accountable business, there should be independent auditing of services which are so important to our communities. I highly commend this private member's bill as sound, practical and something that will take our great health service forward and that will provide the public of Queensland with an enhanced health service through enhanced performance.