



Speech by
NITA CUNNINGHAM
MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard 27 April 2004

BUNDABERG BASE HOSPITAL, COMMENTS OF MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hon J. I. CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (12.00 p.m.): Last week the member for Burnett made some outrageous statements in this House and in the media about the base hospital in my electorate of Bundaberg that reflect badly on everyone working at that hospital. I can understand that the member for Burnett wants to build a profile, but he is not going to do it at the expense of our hospital. This same denigration of our hospital was done regularly from 1998 to 2001 by a former National Party member for Burnett, and as a result of his constant misrepresentation of what was being achieved at that hospital we could not get doctors to fill vacancies in Bundaberg, and when we did get them they would not stay. That member's constant and irresponsible statements and the use of our hospital as a political football caused enormous problems for the hospital, an unprecedented drop in staff morale and indeed contributed to that member losing his seat at the very next election. It was a terrible time for staff, patients and for their families, and nobody in Bundaberg wants a repeat of those three years.

The current member for Burnett asked: why has the member for Bundaberg not spoken out about this crisis? That is because there is no crisis. In fact, our hospital is working better now than it has in the past six years. Instead of speaking out to get my name in the media, I have been working tirelessly to gain better funding for the hospital, better services and better conditions, better equipment and better buildings, and shorter waiting times for patients. During my two terms in office, to name just some examples, the hospital budget has risen by 35 per cent; the \$27 million redevelopment has been completed; we have gained a new rheumatology clinic; the four-chair renal dialysis clinic has been increased to 11 chairs; mental health buildings have been improved; the outpatient clinic has been expanded from just six rooms to now 14 rooms; modern birthing suites have been added; new staff accommodation is complete; and modern equipment, including a CT scanner, has been installed.

All medical positions are now full. Our nurses are highly qualified, compassionate and caring. Up-to-date, modern equipment and technology are available. During the minister's recent visit to the hospital we were met with positive comments from staff and patients, and I can say that I have a steady stream of residents contacting my office singing the praises of our hospital, the staff and the treatment they have received. The member for Burnett's claims about unclean operating theatres is outrageous. I have never heard such a claim, and it is an insult to everyone working in those theatres. The member's claim that people are dying unnecessarily is just as outrageous and unsubstantiated. It will cause grief to those who have lost family and friends recently and is totally lacking in the responsibility that people expect from elected members.

While our hospital sees some 43,000 patients each year, there will always be some who are not satisfied. But it is the state member's job to follow up complaints and see if he can help those people, not just use their problems for his own benefit. While our hospital has 860 people on the payroll, making almost 500 full-time equivalent positions, there will always be some who are dissatisfied. But there are appropriate processes in place for those people to air their concerns and to address them appropriately. There is still plenty to do, as there is in every hospital, public and private, in all parts of Australia. I will continue to work for the best possible deal for our hospital and for our residents. Meanwhile, patients in Bundaberg can be confident that they will receive top quality treatment at the Bundaberg Base Hospital.