



Speech by

Hon. Nita Cunningham

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard Wednesday, 24 November 2004

ONCOLOGY SERVICES

Hon. N.I. CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (10.29 a.m.): On 7 October the member for Cunningham stated that the Health Minister has privatised oncology services and patients are being charged for cancer treatment in our public hospitals. I do not know how the opposition gets it so wrong, but I stand in this House today not just to dispute that member's statements but to sing loudly my praises of Queensland Health's oncology units.

Cancer patients in Queensland do have access to free cancer treatment, which for radium can include some two months of professional consultation with specialists and up to six and a half weeks of daily radium treatment administered by highly trained staff and constant help from trained nurses, dieticians, speech therapists, the dental clinic, the X-ray department and the staff who make the plastic masks for almost every individual patient. All of these staff members are highly professional and outstandingly committed. On top of this intense program, creams, lotions, medications and drinks are all made available. Also, a competent administrative staff coordinates appointments between 8.00 a.m. and 10.30 p.m. every day to work in with people's work commitments and travel arrangements.

I have just experienced this treatment first-hand at the Royal Brisbane Hospital and I can say that all of my six and a half weeks of life-saving, professional help cost me nothing, except some \$40 for medication particular to my case that had to be provided by a pharmacy. I saw cancer patients from the Torres Strait to the border, the old and the very young, which is very, very sad, and I did not hear a single complaint. Everyone spoke very highly of the amazing attitude of the staff and the fact that they have time to address problems as they arise. Last week I had a chance to respond to a patient satisfaction survey, and I was very pleased to have that opportunity. I stated—

My treatment far surpassed anything I may have imagined or expected.

The staff, particularly Nurse Unit Manager Carol Parker, made every problem seem insignificant and their amazing attitude keeps everyone's spirits up at a time that would otherwise be personally traumatic for most of us.

I say to the Minister for Health: we are providing oncology services in Queensland that are second to none. It is life-saving treatment, and we can all be extremely proud that we can and we do provide it free of charge.