



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Thursday, 26 May 2005

HEALTH SYSTEM

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (9.36 pm): When Martin Bryant shot and killed 35 people at Port Arthur in 1996, horror and grief overwhelmed the nation. Today, Queenslanders are hearing heartbreaking stories about how 87 people may have died due to the actions of one doctor and the inaction of a public health system that did nothing about serious complaints from families, doctors and nurses.

How could this have happened? Hopefully, the Morris royal commission will reveal the truth. This inquiry is even more significant than the Fitzgerald inquiry as people have lost their lives due to a corrupt health system. One thing is already evident: the nasty bullying culture of some sections of the health department has punished truth tellers and driven out a lot of good people.

During my time as shadow health minister, I warned about this bullying culture. It never ceased to amaze me how good people working in Queensland Health were scared to speak out because of fear of retribution. I also warned about the dangers of moves by the previous health minister, Wendy Edmond, to downgrade the role of Queensland's Chief Health Officer, who is the principal monitor of quality issues in Queensland's health department. She removed statutory powers from this position under 18 acts of parliament to make it subservient to the chief bean counter of Queensland Health. The draconian gutting of this role resulted in its then office-bearer quitting. Thus I believe the culture to suppress dissent has occurred at the highest levels of the health department and the Beattie Labor government. If patient care was truly to be put first, an independent monitor of quality issues in Queensland Health needed to be strengthened, not weakened.

The National Party opposition will still call for government guarantees that whistleblowers will not be victimised for coming forward to the Morris inquiry. Unfortunately, until the culture in Queensland Health is changed and whistleblowers are protected for speaking out on such important issues, there will continue to be concerns that others will not come forward. I urge people who are interested in making a submission or learning more about the process to read Tony Morris QC's web site on <http://www.bhci.qld.gov.au>.

The culture of fear must stop. The culture of fear has gone on for too long. People have paid with their lives because of the culture of fear within Queensland Health. That is an indictment upon this government. The truth must come out and the system will be fixed only when that culture itself is dead.