



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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AMBULANCE SERVICES, CHARTERS TOWERS ELECTORATE

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (10.45 pm): I would like to raise a very important issue regarding the essential ambulance services within the city of Charters Towers and the Charters Towers electorate as a whole. Ambulance workers save countless lives and provide a wonderful, essential emergency service. However, this service is being compromised by a government that is more concerned about saving dollars than lives and looking after the wellbeing of the community.

Since the introduction of the new roster system, coupled with staff shortages and the requirement to fill staff shortages in other centres, our ambulance workers are constantly fatigued from continually being recalled to duty. Workers can commence duty at 2 pm and finish at midnight and at the end of the shift take a vehicle home to be on call. Workers can be called out up to three times after the completion of their shift which then throws the whole roster into turmoil.

Charters Towers has four fully equipped ambulances, and only two officers are rostered on duty to operate one vehicle. The two ambulance workers are often snowed under by emergency call-outs and routine transports. When one vehicle is called out the station is unattended. If there is a second emergency call-out, staff who have already worked the previous shift are called out. In many cases the staff are not only fatigued but are practising students who are not qualified to administer basic drugs, use the cardiac monitor to monitor heart rhythm or defibrillate if someone's heart stops.

I dispute the comments made by emergency services minister, Chris Cummins, that there are no staff shortages and that his roster reform ensures paramedics are not burdened by fatigue. I say to the minister, 'Your system is not working.' The minister needs to get out of his subterranean existence and venture out and listen to the community and the grassroots ambulance workers. The workers need to be given the chance to speak out without fear of recrimination or reprisal.

We have a situation where people have waited long periods of time for ambulance attention and have no other choice but to transport patients to hospital themselves. In some cases schools have arranged with parents to transport children with broken bones to the hospital because it is quicker than waiting for an ambulance.

Another important issue that the minister needs to understand is that the roster system that forces officers to work eight- to 10-hour shifts on a five-day roster and then back up on their rostered time off to cover staff shortages has placed an enormous strain on paramedics and a great strain on their family life.

It is up to the Labor government to provide an available, safe and efficient ambulance service to the community. At present the state government has failed the residents of Charters Towers and the surrounding districts. If the government does not change the present roster system and it does not provide more qualified staff and rectify the system, we may see a loss of life. The government promised when it brought in the unfair ambulance levy that it would improve the services.

Time expired.