



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Tuesday, 22 November 2005

HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL; HEALTH PRACTITIONERS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (7.58 pm): The proposed amendments, in the minister's words, are the first step along the road to much-needed, wide-ranging reforms in our public health system.

I am alarmed to witness the closure of another medical facility in Charters Towers because of problems recruiting qualified doctors. Bedside Manner provided a wonderful service of patient care to hostels and aged care facilities such as Eventide and Dalrymple Villa. This closure will impact heavily on other services throughout the Charters Towers and Townsville region.

Also, I am led to believe that there is a waiting list of up to two weeks for patients to see doctors at other medical centres. This means that many of our elderly, sick and frail are on the road, putting greater pressure on public hospitals, such as Townsville hospital, and other medical facilities. To recruit qualified doctors, the government needs to provide greater incentive packages to work in rural and regional towns. As members would be aware, between petrol prices and other costs, the cost of living in these towns is much more expensive. For doctors to move from city areas to regional towns, there needs to be greater incentive packages. Sometimes they are not used to rural and regional conditions.

The public hospitals in these rural and regional areas have been downsized. That has caused problems. Those areas have lost surgeons, anaesthetists and other specialists. People from rural and regional areas—people on properties—go to Charters Towers to seek medical treatment. The medical facilities in that town are under strain. That puts greater pressure on the medical services in Townsville. The same thing is happening in Emerald and Rockhampton.

We need to provide more services to solve this problem. We need medical surgeons and anaesthetists in these country towns. Women should have the assurance that they can have their babies in their home town. Why on earth does it take 14 months for a 10-year-old girl with tonsillitis to be put on the waiting list? Such issues need to be addressed.

Lastly, I refer to the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. Year after year we have seen medical services in these country areas close down. People are now travelling round trips of thousands of kilometres to get access to special medical treatment, yet they are still receiving a subsidy of a lousy 10c a kilometre. That is the same level of subsidy that was offered 10 or 15 years ago. I believe that matter needs to be addressed.