



Speech by

Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS REGISTRATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (6.22 pm): It gives me great pride tonight to rise to make a few comments in relation to the bill before the House. No-one in this House believes that the question facing Queensland Health and in fact Queensland on this issue is a simple one. It is a complicated question that is going to take a lot of thought by many people in this chamber and elsewhere to resolve. I do say to the government that it is taking steps in an effort to resolve the problem that has plagued this state since 1998 and of course exploded about 12 months ago as a consequence of the brilliant work by the member for Burnett and other members in this chamber on this side of the House—

An opposition member: And Toni Hoffman.

Mr McARDLE:—to highlight the danger Queensland Health was posing to the people of Queensland. I take the interjection by the member relating to Toni Hoffman and her brave stand to run contrary to the flow, to become a whistleblower and to provide the impetus for what ended up being the Davies inquiry and the brilliant report that Commissioner Davies did in fact produce.

It is always important to remember on these occasions that it does derive from a drastic situation that developed over a period of time that we have now come to look at an issue that had been bubbling under the surface for a number of years. The bill has a very good end result in mind—that is, it implements the anticipated national approach to streamline the registration of international medical graduates and to expedite processes for registration of medical practitioners. The shadow minister highlighted one particular concern, and that of course is that if registration fails to occur within 25 days it must be reported to the minister with reasons given for the delay and an outline of what actions the board will take to avoid this in the future.

The shadow minister, based upon very clear and cogent history, rightfully raised the concern of rushing the registration process whereby doctors from overseas are going to be practising here in Queensland on the people who not so long ago were practised upon by medical practitioners who failed to meet the basic standards. That is a realistic approach to adopt—that is, we have every right to question a process that in the past has failed to provide an adequate and ongoing medical service to the people of Queensland.

It is also very important to comprehend that the faith of the people of Queensland in the Queensland health system has been totally shattered. The last 12 to 18 months have highlighted to them the clear deficiencies in Queensland Health, and that has again been highlighted in the final report by Commissioner Davies and the recommendations that he makes therein. The concern raised by the shadow health minister in particular details the fact that the registration of an overseas trained practitioner may not be based on the country of registration. It may well be that registration occurs in South Africa or Canada, and they may well be countries that are prescribed by regulation as suitable candidates for registration in Queensland. But of course that is simply insufficient in my opinion to ensure the qualifications at the source are going to be of a standard required by Queensland.

That is why the shadow health minister's amendment makes a great deal of common sense. It simply proposes a regime that looks at the training of the individual. It also looks at that person having

actually practised in the country that he is currently registered in before he is taken on board in Queensland. It is common sense. It is not a foolproof system. No system is foolproof, but certainly it will put in place a regime that is going to provide greater safety and greater precaution, and hopefully as a consequence of this amendment, if taken up by the government, we will not see a repeat of the debacle that occurred in the last two to three years in this state.

There is also of course a very common-sense amendment whereby the candidate for registration is required to communicate in spoken and written English at a professional level with patients and other persons. There are many instances, even across the Sunshine Coast, where people have in fact communicated with doctors and have had no opportunity to understand what the doctor is saying to them or, worse, the doctor not hearing or comprehending the ailment they are suffering from. That particular scenario is very important in a doctor-patient relationship. It is based upon the understanding one to the other that develops a situation of trust that is so critical to a patient, particularly when the medical practitioner is going to have an ongoing relationship with the individual and perhaps even that person's family. As I said, the amendments proposed by the shadow health minister are entirely practicable and they are common sense. I would hope that the government would look at those amendments and take them on board.

On a topic closer to home, there is still the unresolved question of the placement of the Sunshine Coast's new hospital. We are now almost 12 months away from the May 2005 announcement of Sippy Downs being the new site. I understand that the minister's office—and he may correct me on this point—indicated to my office that it would be January 2006 when either a meeting would take place or an announcement would be made at least shortening, if not definitively announcing, the placement of the new hospital. We now find ourselves in March 2006 and that announcement has not taken place.

The Sunshine Coast is in need of doctors, just like any other place across Queensland, and the new hospital on the Sunshine Coast is an integral part of the growth and development of the area. The population continues to grow, and the needs of the population are expanding well beyond the current services that are available in the region. I would urge the minister to at least give some indication as to when the people across the Sunshine Coast can anticipate an announcement being made to cater for their needs.

Closer to home yet again is the Caloundra Hospital. I have to commend the minister in that the Caloundra Hospital has received significant new services in recent times for which the people of Caloundra are thankful. I am hopeful that the minister will again elaborate further on what new plans he has for the Caloundra Hospital in the future.