



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.07 pm): Health is one of the most serious issues that we have to deal with in this parliament. The promise by the Premier to resign at the end of this year if he does not fix the absolute mess that he has led the health system into needs to be brought to account. That is what we are doing tonight. We are setting some benchmarks for this Premier.

The government is a government of stunts. We see the badges and the yellow ribbons that are an insult to the people of Caboolture and Queensland, but we are going to bring them to account tonight. I will tell members about the mess that we inherited when we took over government after Peter Beattie had been the health minister. We had the worst waiting lists in Australia: 43 per cent of category 1 patients were done on time, leaving some 57 per cent not done on time. We put in place Surgery on Time and within 12 months from 1 July 1996 we took that up to nearly 98 per cent of people having their category 1 operation on time.

In the 10 months from 1 July 1997 we took the category 2s up from the mess that they were in when we came to government to somewhere in the order of 80 per cent before the election. In those two years we did almost 13,000 more operations than had happened in the previous two years of the Goss government. That is what the coalition could do and that is what we will do because our shadow minister has a plan, which he has already announced, to put in place boards at the hospitals so that we will get good leadership and management of our hospitals.

I want to tell this parliament tonight about some of the tragic things that are happening in our system. We have seen the closure of accident and emergency departments at hospitals like Caboolture, we have seen staff forced out and tonight we heard that 761 staff have resigned in the past 12 months. I think the figure for the past six months was over 500.

The health minister, to use his own words, just does not get it, does he? The problem is that all the money in the world can be put in, but people do not want to work in a culture of bullying, intimidation, cover-up and Labor Party spin doctoring. People want to work in an honest system with decent leadership that starts right at the top with the health minister. They want to work in a system where they are valued, where they are treated as professionals and that realises, like we do, that the patient comes first.

Let us look at the Emerald Hospital. My colleague Vaughan Johnson has, in his massive electorate, the Emerald Hospital at the eastern end of his electorate. It deals with almost 300 babies a year. Young families in a booming area now do not have obstetric services at the hospital. It was closed over the Christmas-New Year period and it is still closed. It is absolutely tragic for young families in those areas to lose services like that.

Have a look at the mental health unit at Toowoomba. It is one of the major centres for mental health treatment because of the Baillie Henderson Hospital and the 57-bed unit at the Toowoomba Base Hospital. We look after all of south-western Queensland, from Gatton out to Birdsville. We should have eight specialists. At last count, when we brought the matter up in the local paper, Queensland Health came forward and said that it had four specialists. I can tell members that, of those four, one had already

resigned and two were on extended leave. So we really had only one full-time specialist when we should have had eight.

The rural people in south-western Queensland do not have access to a psychiatrist because we do not have enough specialists. People are languishing in the beds of that mental health unit because they are not being treated by psychiatrists, they are not receiving a proper regime of treatment and they are in there for too long. They are aggressive towards the staff. They attack and bully the staff. Some patients are even waiting to be sent over to the Baillie Henderson Hospital and they are not receiving the proper regime of treatment and care.

The staff are devastated. The adolescent ward was closed down with one hour's notice to families that their young ones were being sent to Brisbane. Orthopaedic services have been cancelled at the hospital because we do not have the surgeons. We are on constant bypass, which is almost unheard of for the Toowoomba Base Hospital. Country people, country doctors and ambulance officers have been told to bypass the Toowoomba Hospital. The other day, it was on bypass all day—even accident and emergency. Do members know how they fixed it? They moved an 82-year-old man from his hometown hospital to Gatton Hospital. His son had to go up and feed him.

That is how this government treats the people of Toowoomba and that is what it is doing to people all around Queensland. It is an absolute disgrace how this government has let this system deteriorate. There are wonderful people who work in Queensland Health but the problem is the leadership, from the minister down—the succession of ministers that we have had. It is a Labor Party cover-up. It is the culture, it is the brutality and it is the intimidation. It forces out people like the great director of emergency services that we had about four or five years ago. They are all gone. They do not want to work here. There is only one solution: put us in and we will fix it.

Time expired.