



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard Wednesday, 9 August 2006

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL (ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B)

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (3.41 pm): In this debate relating to the report of Estimates Committee B I want to speak about some matters to do with health, particularly in Toowoomba. One of the most important things that was canvassed at the estimates committee hearing was the issue of waiting lists. I give credit to the staff of the Toowoomba Base Hospital for working so hard to get waiting lists within the time frames that were set for categories 1, 2 and 3 when Surgery on Time was introduced back in 1996. For those people who have been lucky enough to get on to these waiting lists, the hospital has been able to do a good job with them. The latest figures show that they were within the time frames and the guidelines for categories 1 and 2. Those hardworking staff should certainly receive credit for that.

I referred to those people as being lucky enough to get on to the waiting lists. The latest figures that were issued by Queensland Health in the Queensland public hospitals specialist outpatient service status report reveal that in Toowoomba there were 5,478 people on the waiting list to get on to the waiting list. That is simply to get them on to the surgical waiting list. These people have been referred by their GP because, in the GP's belief, they are in need of surgery. They are waiting to have a surgical outpatient assessment at the Toowoomba Base Hospital to get on to the waiting list. So although the waiting list is within the time frame for category 1 and category 2, there are some 5,478 people waiting to see a specialist to get on to the waiting list.

Added to that there are 1,796 people waiting to get on to the medical waiting list. The real issue is the need to get more doctors to work at the hospital, in particular visiting medical officers. We need VMOs to attend at hospitals and work additional four-hour sessions in outpatient or surgery. But they have been driven away by the way in which the Beattie Labor government operates the Queensland health system.

Any truthful and accurate debate about the waiting list system has to include these figures. Of late, Queensland Health seems loath to bring these figures out into the open. But the true facts are that in Toowoomba there are 5,478 people waiting to get on to the surgical waiting list to be a category 1, category 2 or category 3 patient and there are 1,796 people waiting to get on to the medical list.

It is no wonder that sometimes we have blockages in the hospital. Without doctors making decisions over the weekend as to whether people should be discharged, the hospital has major problems on Mondays. That is a particularly bad day for people lying on trolleys waiting to get into a bed, because no discharge decisions were made over the weekend. In recent days 15 people were on trolleys at the hospital waiting to get into a bed. So the situation is occurring not just at south-east Queensland hospitals; it is occurring at the hospital in my electorate as well.

I also had some correspondence from the Minister for Health about a person who was very concerned about their need to have a colonoscopy. That person had a previous medical history that showed that they needed to have this procedure. It takes at least 14 months from the initial sign that the person needs this procedure until they potentially get a diagnosis. Unfortunately, there is now a staff vacancy in the colonoscopy service at the Toowoomba Base Hospital. So the wait could well be longer.

Even the minister admitted that there is going to be at least a 10- or 12-month wait for this procedure. He admitted that before the staff vacancy occurred. Those are the sorts of issues and problems we are facing.

In dental services, there is only one hour each morning in which people can ring to make an appointment. That phone is engaged for most of the time. So people sit on the phone and listen to it ring, ring, ring for an hour to try to get an appointment. The only time they can ring to get an appointment is between 8 and 9. People ring, ring and ring. They do not get through so then they ring again the next day. It goes on and on and on.

We need some funding for that hospital to provide at least some administrative or receptionist services that can take the phone calls and can make some appointments for people. The staff are working so hard just trying to do the professional work of the dental services and they have this particular problem. I do not know whether that situation occurs at other hospitals, but that demonstrates the lack of funding that exists for adequate administration so that dentists and their assistants can do the work. People should be able to at least ring up, get through and make an appointment, whether it is for an emergency or for straightforward dental services.