



Speech by

Hon. Nita Cunningham

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard Tuesday, 6 June 2006

HEALTH QUALITY AND COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

Hon. NITA CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (12.05 pm): During the last sitting week of this parliament a bill to establish the Health Quality and Complaints Commission was passed—an important step towards restoring accountability and trust in health services in Queensland. But we also need to restore the morale in our hospitals and the confidence in our communities. We can all contribute to that by simply speaking of the changes that are being made, the progress that is occurring and the good things that are happening—the thousands of people who every day are getting marvellous treatment through a vastly expanded health industry, both public and private.

We constantly hear from the opposition of the problems in the public system but never about the problems in the private system. Indeed, there is a vast difference between what the opposition demands from the public system and what it is happy to accept from the private system. Bundaberg is desperately short of private GPs, and surgeries cannot even get replacement doctors because of the national and international shortages and because of the federal government's system of allocating provider numbers which is a disaster. I know that many areas in Queensland have this serious problem, but we never hear any complaints about this from the opposition.

I have approached our federal member, as have a number of our medical centres, but still the problem persists. I call on the opposition to speak up for our private doctors and get their partners in Canberra to fix its system and stop restricting doctors in areas of need. In Bundaberg people are waiting up to three weeks for an appointment with their private GP. Many of our private GPs have closed their books because they are totally unable to accept any more patients.

Two weeks ago a private specialist referred me to another specialist here in Brisbane. The earliest available appointment is 8 August. I am not complaining about this because I understand how busy these people are. However, we would certainly be hearing about it in this House if such delays were in the public system.

I heard of another very sad case recently. A young man in his early 40s came to me. He said, 'I know you cannot help me with this, Nita, but I just want you to know how unfair the health system is.' Recently his wife had surgery with a private specialist in a private hospital. It cost them a lot of money, but they thought they should get her the best treatment available. This man told me that the operation was totally botched and his relatively young wife is now a semi-invalid with the need for ongoing treatment and alterations to their home. He went to his solicitor to seek compensation and was told he did not have enough money to win such a case. The man said to me, 'It is just not fair. As private patients we paid so dearly for private health cover, for a private surgeon and for a private hospital and cannot now fight for compensation.' Public patients see their doctors, their surgeons and have their operations free of cost. If it goes wrong they can get their legal fees paid and get access to compensation.

I am very pleased that this new commission will be able to monitor both private and public health services and may be able to help in circumstances such as my constituent finds his family in. As I said earlier, there is a vast difference between what the opposition is demanding from the public health system and what it is very happy to accept from the private system. But let us have a little bit of fairness in the

criticisms. There are certainly problems in both systems, and both systems need help from federal and state governments to meet the present and future health needs of all Queenslanders.

I take this opportunity to again place on record in this House the outstanding work being done in the oncology unit at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, where I have now been a patient on two occasions. We heard recently from the opposition about a delay in these services in Townsville. I do not know the details of that delay—sometimes it relates to the particular surgery—but here in Brisbane it was just 14 days from when I found I had to have radiation treatment to the time the preparation and treatment actually started.

I commend the entire staff—doctors, nurses, receptionists and the professional staff who make the moulds, do the preparatory work and administer the radiation. They simply cannot do enough for the patients, and their happy, friendly attitude and constant help in so many ways keep the patients feeling positive and keep their spirits up. During my 25 daily visits I saw only one unhappy person, and he will probably take his problem to the opposition. But there were hundreds and hundreds of others who were very happy and very pleased with the treatment that they were getting. Noting the very high number of patients coming to Brisbane from Bundaberg, Childers and Hervey Bay, I sincerely ask the minister to consider Bundaberg as the base for the next new oncology unit.