



Speech by

**Hon. PETER BEATTIE**

**MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL**

Hansard Tuesday, 7 March 2006

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## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Caboolture Hospital, Emergency Department**

**Hon. PD BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.38 am): Today I am pleased to be able to deliver on a very important commitment that the Minister for Health, Stephen Robertson, and I made to the people of Caboolture—their emergency department will again be operating a 24-hour service. From Tuesday, 18 April the service that the people of Caboolture expect and demand will be restored. As an interim measure, from Monday, 27 March the emergency department, currently open between 8 am and 4 pm, will operate until 11 pm each day.

This is a major breakthrough in the grip of a chronic shortage of doctors. The minister, Stephen Robertson, and his department have worked incredibly hard to bring about this result. I thank him publicly for doing so. A national shortage of doctors has robbed the people of Caboolture of a fully functioning emergency department since 16 January. My government has been working hard to find a sustainable solution for the people of Caboolture.

Today we can deliver that solution. This morning, the Director-General of Queensland Health, Uschi Schreiber, will sign a contract with a reputable Australian medical organisation, Aspen Medical, after a closed tender process. Aspen Medical is based in Canberra but has operations across Australia and around the world, specialising in providing health care, particularly emergency medicine, to areas of high demand.

Aspen has current contacts with the Western Australian government and the Australian Defence Force. It also provides surgical services in Northern Ireland and across several districts in England. In addition, it provides services in South-East Asia and the Pacific. As part of Queensland's agreement, Aspen will supply the level of medical staff required to operate the Caboolture emergency department 24 hours a day for 12 months. This approach is also designed to build a new model in the delivery of emergency care that will draw upon strengths of the past administration at Caboolture as well as introduce new ideas based on Aspen's experience in other states and countries. While this service is provided for 12 months, it will enable a service to be provided after the 12 months of the agreement, which is world best practice.

Caboolture's predicted medical staff vacancies are 4.8 full-time equivalent senior medical officers or emergency specialists, including a director of ED, and nine full-time equivalent principal house officers or registrars. That is what Aspen will provide. The contract, which is being finalised for signature today, is expected to be worth \$7.08 million over the 12 months. Aspen will effectively run the Caboolture emergency department on behalf of Queensland Health for 12 months, with an option to carry on for another 12 months if required. If the Redcliffe-Caboolture Health Service District—and we will be up-front about this—were to provide this level of staffing to run the Caboolture emergency department, it is anticipated that it would cost \$3.5 million. The expected variance of \$3.58 million is significant, but what is at stake is a fully functional, sustainable emergency department for the people of Caboolture. To overcome the doctor shortage we have to pay for it. In a nutshell, to overcome the doctor shortage we have to pay for it. So that is why the costs are higher. The other option was to wait until the district recruited enough staff,

and while it has been working hard to find experienced people it has met with limited success. Today's contract signing means that Caboolture residents will not have to wait any longer than is necessary.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the doctors and nurses who have worked so hard to keep Caboolture Hospital's emergency department functioning. I also want to place on record my thanks and gratitude to the CareFlight team and to the Mater Hospital for their assistance during a very difficult time. All senior doctors, including registrars, will be paid by Aspen, as will an additional nurse educator who will focus on skills and professional development for our ED nurses. All other nursing and medical staff will be paid by Queensland Health. Aspen will immediately undertake discussions with current senior doctors who have announced their intention to resign, as well as doctors who have been previously employed at Caboolture, to determine whether they would reconsider their decision and either stay at or return to Caboolture under these new arrangements. The doctors can be part of this plan. They have an opportunity to be part of this plan. We would love to see them be part of this plan.

A project team at Caboolture to manage the emergency department and all emergency department staff will report to Aspen's project manager. In a separate component of the contract, Aspen will engage in a full review of the emergency department worth \$1.7 million. A lot of lessons have been learned from the Caboolture experience. The need for better, smarter, short- and long-term workforce planning and other HR strategies was clearly evident. Aspen will work with Queensland Health to deliver these improvements and deliver a greater investment in education, research and professional development at Caboolture to allow the emergency department to be restored to its former status.

This morning the central area manager and district manager are briefing hospital staff and contacting those ED staff not currently at work. The Minister for Health will be supervising it. The director-general of Queensland Health is briefing key stakeholders, including the Queensland Nurses Union and the Queensland Public Sector Union. Earlier this morning the health minister and I met with Australian Medical Association Queensland President Steve Hambleton, who is comfortable with the plan to rebuild and restore the reputation of Caboolture emergency department to its previous status as a flagship in the Queensland public health system for hospitals of comparable size and Aspen's undertaking to continue to engage with the AMA and the College of Emergency Medicine. The members for Pumicestone and Glass House have also been extensively briefed on the agreement. I want to thank them for making representations on behalf of their constituents. I know this has been a difficult political issue for them but, like the government, they know that the most important thing to look after is patients and the people of Caboolture. That is why the members for Pumicestone and Glass House have advocated fiercely on behalf their constituents, and I want to acknowledge that today.

The agreement that Queensland Health has entered into is unique. Is it the ideal outcome for Caboolture and my government? Is it? The answer to that is that it is not. I would rather be able to recruit doctors to Caboolture on our own. However, Aspen can supply doctors in April, so it would have been foolish to ignore this opportunity. This agreement delivers for Caboolture. It provides an immediate and sustainable solution for the district, the hospital and its staff. Through the review, it will also play a key role in my government's efforts to rebuild our health system. Most importantly, this agreement returns the Caboolture emergency department to a 24-hour, seven-day-per-week service. It is a service the people of Caboolture have demanded be returned as soon as possible, and one they have every right to expect. Again to the people of Caboolture, I regret the loss of a full service over the past seven weeks. Today is about making it right, and I look forward to the full return of services at the emergency department on 18 April.

I would urge everybody to be supportive of this proposal. I know that it has been a difficult time for this community and for this hospital, and both the local members for Pumicestone and Glass House have made that very clear. Stephen Robertson, the Minister for Health, has responded, and so has the health department, as quickly as is humanly possible. We do want the doctors who have resigned to stay. We do want those who formerly worked there to consider coming back and being part of this Aspen arrangement. Of course it is their choice. We want them to. If they do not wish to, of course that is their choice. But I would hope that those who are genuinely interested in providing health services to the people of Caboolture will support what we have done. I know we have had a lot of politics about all of this, and that is fine. We needed to respond to those pressures, and we have. What we need now is to turn the page and move on. As everybody knows, the government has a health plan. Restoring accident and emergency services at Caboolture was part of that health plan. That is one of the reasons why I am appealing to both sides of politics today to give it a go. Do not go out to try to undermine it. Give it a go. Give it a go for the people of Caboolture. Give it a go for the people who need accident and emergency treatment. Give it a go for those people who want to be confident that their accident and emergency centre at Caboolture can look after their needs.

If they continue to go out and undermine the Caboolture Hospital, all they do is undermine the public's confidence in it. This arrangement is the best that we can provide bearing in mind that we have a doctor shortage. Everybody understands the doctor shortage. It is a doctor shortage that is national and indeed international. We cannot create doctors out of thin air. But what we can do is bend over backwards

to provide this level of care and service to the people of Caboolture. So I make a direct appeal to all sides of politics to give this a fair go. It will not be easy. It is not the best option. We would have preferred different options, but it is the best option that we can come up with bearing in mind that there is a doctor shortage. That is why it is important that we give this as much support as we possibly can. The people of Caboolture deserve no less.