



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Wednesday, 15 February 2006

HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (6.17 pm): I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition's motion and to oppose the Premier's amendment. It has been 330 days since Toni Hoffman's concerns about Dr Jayant Patel were raised in this parliament. I must congratulate her on being made a national local hero at the recent Australia Day Awards. Her courage meant that lives were saved and that we finally heard the truth. It is 330 days since we finally started hearing the truth about Queensland's health system. Before that, it was the best health system in the world!

It has been 330 days since we found out that the Bundaberg Hospital was almost dysfunctional. The people of Bundaberg and Burnett were dying unnecessarily and being harmed in a sick public health system. Doctors, nurses and allied health professionals were being bullied and victimised by arrogant public servants who were following the orders of arrogant Labor politicians. Which politician—was it the Premier or the former health minister—gave the order for a taxpayer funded, international air ticket to be bought for 'Dr Death'? We still have not heard an answer to that very important question.

The government has had 330 days to get the basics right and implement policies to fix Bundaberg Hospital. The Premier, Peter Beattie, has failed and has forgotten my community. Today, when the health minister announced extra beds for hospitals all around the state—Townsville, Ipswich and Redlands—Bundaberg Hospital missed out yet again. My community was forgotten. Indeed, my community was punished by this Labor government.

Today in 2006 our hospital only has 120 beds. In 1989 we had 216 beds. At Bundaberg we have had a decrease in beds of more than 45 per cent while experiencing more than a 40 per cent increase in population, and today we received nothing more than a kick in the guts from the health minister and this Labor government. He talked about access block this morning, and he and the Premier have received enough correspondence from me and visited enough times to Bundaberg now after the 'Dr Death' scandal broke to know that Bundaberg is suffering from an endemic shortage of beds and therefore having severe access block. Empty beds are so scarce in Bundaberg that patients are lying in the corridors for more than five hours. Adults are being mixed with children in paediatrics. Sick patients are being prematurely discharged. Medical and surgical wards have an occupancy rate of more than 95 per cent with no surgical capacity whatsoever. There are 30 beds in medical and 30 in surgery and you are lucky if they ever have a spare bed there at all. Peter Beattie and the Labor Party have forgotten the victims of Dr Patel and their families. Peter Beattie and the Labor Party have forgotten the people of Bundaberg and the Burnett. Peter Beattie and his Labor Party have forgotten the nurses, doctors and allied health workers at the Bundaberg Base Hospital.

Since Toni Hoffman spoke out our surgery waiting lists have grown, ICU has been downgraded to HDU, acute mental health care has been scrapped, we have lost 16 beds—and the Bundaberg Hospital should be the best hospital in Australia considering what happened there. That is where the meltdown started. It is not. Patel victims are being forced on waiting lists to see specialists. Patients are still being lied to by arrogant bureaucracy hell-bent on covering up and doing the Premier's dirty work. I refer to the patient that I have written to the health minister about who recently contracted golden staph there. Doctors

are being underpaid and bullied. I have just had a letter faxed to me by a group of anonymous doctors, not necessarily from Bundaberg, who say—

We dare not put our names to a paper for fear of retribution. Queensland Health has not changed.

They say that Queensland Health has not changed.

Mrs Miller: Table it!

Mr MESSENGER: I will table that letter and also tables showing how much doctors are being paid. Some of the doctors who make up the engine room of accident and emergency in our health services are being paid \$23 an hour—\$23 an hour! A second-year RMO—

Mrs Miller: Rubbish!

Mr MESSENGER: Look at the chart! A second-year RMO is being paid \$25 an hour. A clerk working for Queensland Health is being paid the same amount.

Mrs Miller: Table it!

Mr MESSENGER: It is tabled.

Time expired.