



Speech by

Rosa Lee Long

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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CAIRNS BASE HOSPITAL

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (8.46 pm): I speak again tonight about the failure of Queensland Health, and in particular mental health and the Cairns Base Hospital, to protect the life of one of my constituents. The woman in question suicided just six days after being released from the Cairns Base Hospital and the circumstances surrounding that tragedy are simply horrific. She had tried to suicide seven times over the last few months and on three occasions had to be hospitalised. On the seventh attempt she cut her throat from ear to ear and was rushed to Cairns Base Hospital. One might have assumed that she would have been kept in hospital until her mental health was assured and stabilised at the very least.

Instead her sister learnt she was going to be released after only a few days and without having seen a doctor. She was terrified her sister would try to take her life again and sought to stop her release. I intervened and the patient was seen by a professional but the result was still the same. The professional deemed she was fit enough to go home. Just six days later, on her eighth attempt, she succeeded in doing exactly as her family and friends feared—this time, I am advised, with a handful of pills and a dose of Roundup.

Cairns Base Hospital is in meltdown. Staff members are dedicated and hardworking but they are crippled by a lack of beds, funding, resources and staff. That is more reason for the Atherton and Mareeba hospitals to be more fully utilised.

The warning bells have been ringing loud and clear but have been ignored by the Beattie government for years. There have been a number of other recent suicides reported in the media where the victims attended or have tried to attend the Cairns Base Hospital, including a man sent home without any treatment even though he had begged for help. He took his life only hours later. A teenager considered a high suicide risk and for whom follow-up care was arranged was sent home without her parents being advised. She, sadly, too took her own life.

This penny-pinching government must commit unreservedly to improving the facilities available, increasing staff and properly resourcing the Cairns Base Hospital to ensure that people in their hour of need get appropriate help. This is what people across Queensland pay their taxes, fees, levies and charges for—that is, for decent services, for services that keep people alive. They do not want private corporations looking after them from the cradle to the grave at costs which they cannot afford.

There is a high focus on road deaths these days, and rightly so, but I think equal attention should be given to our increasingly depressed society and methods to fix their problems as well. There are times when an institutional answer is the best for all involved, but there has been a deliberate move away from this. The closing of most institutions has brought significant savings for this government. Yet under-resourcing continues to be a major issue in dealing with mental health.

It is not too much to expect that in a crisis help should be available. It is not too much to think that someone who has tried seven times to kill themselves will not just be sent home to try again. There are times when people need to be protected from themselves until they are well again. The alternative only leaves more blood on this government's hands.