



Speech by

Rosemary Menkens

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Hansard Thursday, 12 October 2006

TOWNSVILLE HOSPITAL, MENTAL HEALTH UNIT

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (9.12 pm): I am very concerned about the closure of the secure mental health unit at the Townsville Hospital. This is the only high-security mental health unit north of Brisbane and to have this closed indefinitely will be another huge blow to north Queensland. Word tonight is that this may be a temporary situation, but it is still not good enough. I call on the minister to ensure that Townsville is given the resources to keep this desperately needed facility open. According to Queensland Health this closure is due to staff shortages. But unfortunately for the existing staff, they were the last to know their fate. Word of this did not come from the health department but from desperately concerned whistleblowers.

Again we see secrecy and cover-ups from the health department. I understand that some patients have been transferred to Brisbane and others are now in the medium-security facility. According to newspaper reports, risk assessments were carried out prior to these transfers. What is unknown is whether these arrangements have been undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Mental Health Act 2000 or in accordance with the National Mental Health Strategy. The provisions in the Mental Health Act are quite specific and quite prescriptive. Patients can only be transferred from one authorised mental health service to another on the written order of the director of mental health and the Mental Health Review Tribunal must be given written notice of the transfer within seven days.

And what of the patients' families? Did they have a say in where their respective family members were transferred to? But of most concern to me is the wellbeing of those patients who are hospitalised in the medium-security unit. Those patients are now going to be coaccommodated with patients who were previously considered to be so mentally ill that they needed to be accommodated in a high-security unit. Now these patients are going to be accommodated with less security. The medium-security unit must also be suffering with staff shortages, so can Queensland Health give an unequivocal guarantee that there will be enough staff on roster every day to ensure that those patients in the medium-security unit are given the best care and treatment in the safest environment to ensure their recovery? Can the health department also guarantee the safety of its staff?

And where in this are the three Labor members for Townsville? We listened to the member for Thuringowa loudly lauding his achievements last night, but there was a deathly silence about the mental health facility at Townsville Hospital.

Mr WALLACE: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr WALLACE: If you want to interject you get back to your seat! Get back to your seat!

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! Order!

Mr WALLACE: I rise to a point of order. I find the member's comments offensive and ask for them to be withdrawn.

Mrs MENKENS: I withdraw. This unit was opened in 2002 but has been understaffed and underresourced ever since.

Mr Hopper: You're an imbecile!

Mr WALLACE: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mrs MENKENS: That the government has chosen mental health—

Mr WALLACE: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! That is unparliamentary. You will withdraw.

Mr HOPPER: I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mrs MENKENS: That the government has chosen Mental Health Week to axe this unit is a slap in the face for patients and their families and demonstrates a callous disregard for mental health workers in Townsville.

Mr WALLACE: I rise to a point of order. If the member for Darling Downs wishes to make eyes at me, I wish he would go to his seat so he could do it properly.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. Resume your seat.

Time expired.