



Speech by

**Terry Rogers**

**MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE**

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## **MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS REGISTRATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr ROGERS** (Redcliffe—Lib) (4.49 pm): I rise to speak to the Medical Practitioners Registration Amendment Bill 2006. The purpose of this bill is to enable prompt implementation of an anticipated future change to a national approach to streamline the registration of international medical graduates. This legislation attempts to speed up the application of doctors for registration to the Medical Board whilst at the same time upholding the standards and quality of doctors practising medicine within Queensland. The legislation imposes requirements on the Medical Board to process applications within 25 days while maintaining quality standards. It also allows the board to delegate power to speed and simplify the administration process, and we support this.

Queensland has the right to legislation which will guarantee a quality, strengthened and sound registration process without cutting corners. I support the time based provision to administer registrations within 25 days as this will put an obligation on the board to run efficiently and enable Queenslanders to become competitive in attracting medical practitioners. However, it is crucial for the registration process to be first class to ensure that Beattie's Labor government problems of the past do not continue to damage Queensland's health system.

The people of Queensland need assurances from the Medical Board that the bill's objectives will be met with careful and cautious consideration of standards. In order for the Beattie Labor government to implement an accelerated registration process, it must adequately resource the Medical Board or input safety requirements, not just time limits, for registrations. Adequate resources in the board will avoid the need to cut corners and will allow safe and thorough registration procedures to take place in Queensland.

The huge variance around the world in the standard of medical qualifications places Queensland at risk of a decline in medical standards. With the potential dangers of doctors such as 'Dr Death' facing patients, the government must take responsibility to manage overseas medical registrations properly. It is about high-quality qualification standards and registration processes to get the priorities right for Queensland. Without quality health standards, Queensland runs the risk of being a second option for quality international medical graduates.

Further, without control over which qualifications are acceptable for doctors to practise in this state, we are exposing Queensland to a dangerous and unsatisfactory health system. The bill proposed by the government enables qualifications for general registration to include medical qualifications recognised by a foreign regulatory authority such as the General Medical Council of the United Kingdom—the GMC.

**Mr Lawlor:** We've heard all this.

**Mr ROGERS:** I take that interjection. Labor members may have heard this, but this is the problem. This is the thing that they do not understand. They cannot comprehend the deficiencies of this bill. This effectively means that we would allow foreign registration bodies to choose what qualifications are acceptable for doctors to practise in Queensland. We on this side of the chamber do not accept this regulation and strongly oppose the loophole which it creates.

Further, this regulation does not require overseas regulatory bodies to approve only qualifications from their own jurisdiction. We have made an amendment to try to bring this into force—meaning the General Medical Council could recognise degrees from other countries which would normally not be acceptable for eligibility in Australia. They just cannot comprehend this. I am not saying that these medical practitioners are not capable, but minimum education standards are required for their degree and this can be inferior to that of Queensland standards. We do not want a lowest common denominator degree being accepted in this country, so we have to have a standard that we will accept.

We cannot rely on or allow foreign registration bodies to choose what qualifications are acceptable, and this is a responsibility that must not be delegated. This is a shameless attempt by the government to allow a foreign body to wear the responsibility for its neglect. Yes, we have heard it before. The Beattie Labor government will have yet another avenue to pass the buck by claiming that their qualifications were accredited elsewhere. Only Australian medical bodies—the AMC and in Queensland the Queensland Medical Board—can accept certain qualifications on particular grounds. It is not a decision of a foreign medical regulatory body. We have sought to make changes to introduce safeguards to ensure people approved by foreign regulatory authorities must receive qualifications and practise medicine in the jurisdiction of that country prior to being eligible for registration in Queensland.

It is imperative that we ensure this bill is not simply an opportunity to lower the standards in Queensland. There has to be accountability for each and every practitioner who enters this state. The bill that is in front of us is typical of Labor's window-dressing tactics, as it does not address the problem of finding quality doctors to address Queensland's tragic doctor shortage. The process to get registration at the moment in this country is to pass an English competency test. This is the OET or the IELTS. This takes a few months. Then they have to sit an AMC exam. The AMC exam takes up to a year. Their becoming a doctor can take up to two years at the moment in this state, and the government is in the process of trying to fast-track it to solve its problem. The real issue is that the government has failed in the task of planning for the needs of Queensland in the area of doctor recruitment.

If January is recognised as the common resignation point for doctors in this state—and it has been; it has been mentioned many times in this chamber—why has the government failed to address this ongoing calamity? Why did it get caught out in January? Why did it happen this January—this year? It had to close the emergency department in Caboolture. Why? Because it cannot plan. This government is reactive. It fails to be proactive. Queensland's hospital system was once compared favourably with the best in the world. However, Queensland's health standards and services have tragically declined due to the government's neglect and unethical procedures. Let us put ourselves in the shoes of the people who will be affected by the government's amendments to this legislation and medical staff who have left Queensland Health in droves. The government needs to understand it is about addressing the issues and concerns which are not yet resolved in Queensland Health. In order to provide quality solutions for the people of Queensland, we need to get the standards right in our health system. This will make sure Queensland can provide a quality health system and a workplace that attracts quality medical staff.

Staff development is imperative to Queensland's health system to ensure quality staff stay in the system. We believe this is the area of need and should be the focal point of government reforms. Staff must be provided with incentives, schemes or training plans to ensure medical staff are accessible in order to meet the demand. This type of planning is important in order to increase the quality and quantity of medical staff available in Queensland.

The Queensland health system has let the people of Queensland down. My constituents in Redcliffe and people in Queensland are suffering due to the neglect of this government. The expiring Beattie Labor government has mismanaged, poorly planned and misled the people of Queensland for too long. This bill claims to fix the problems, but what it really does is continue to expose Queenslanders to the overlooked, unsafe and risky procedures of the Labor government.

The current health system in Queensland is extending people's suffering through growing waiting lists and placing them at risk by the customary corner cutting by the Beattie Labor government. They are the words we heard used before: 'corner cutting'. My constituents in Redcliffe deserve better than this and so does the rest of Queensland. We have had misleading '325' medical student campaigns, the false advising of people that Caboolture Hospital is going to remain open and the Dr Patel scandal. How much more can Queensland take? The Beattie Labor government has been branded as a failure in Queensland's health system, and it is time it stopped passing the blame and twisting words and woke up to the reality of what it has done—or what it has not done.

I ask the government to stand up and take responsibility for the issues which remain in our health system. The government needs to be proactive and not just reactive. Its lack of planning and reactive approach is apparent in Queensland's infrastructure and resource management. The Labor government is typically behind the eight ball in everything. It is not interested in water. The Labor government will not be interested in water until we turn the tap on and out comes mud.

**Mr WALLACE:** I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I fail to see how muddy water has anything to do with the entrance of medical practitioners in Queensland.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr English): Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The point will become quite apparent.

They will not be interested in roads until the gridlock is 100 kilometres out of the city. Rail transportation or duplication will not be of interest until there are people climbing on top of trains like the 'Bombay Express'. Certainly no such corner cutting is happening for the Redcliffe railway, either. This reactive legislation is typical of the Beattie Labor government and it is reflected in our health system. Labor did not worry about doctor shortages until it was too late, and now it wants to let the floodgates open to international medical graduates without any quality control, management or proper planning. The government should develop legislation which will play a positive role in the tragic doctor shortage in this state and stop exposing Queensland to unsafe and dangerous medical conduct.