



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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QUEENSLAND AMBULANCE SERVICE

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (5.56 pm): The government's amendment to the coalition motion is an admission by the Beattie government that the Ambulance Service is failing due to bad management. It acknowledges that the budgets and staffing have increased and that the majority of ambulance officers are professional. But it provides no solution to the increasing problems which are occurring.

We agree that the budgets have increased and the majority of ambulance officers are professional and hardworking. Our criticism is that the system is failing and that it is due to bad management. No solutions have come from government members tonight—just more of the same from government. Those opposite say they are spending more money, they say they have fixed the problem but still we are seeing a litany of tragedies unfold which were avoidable.

How horrific do the horror stories about the Ambulance Service have to be before there is an inquiry? Will the government only act when a scandal the size of Dr Patel breaks? Has there been such desensitisation to the accumulating list of tragedies that individual examples of unnecessary deaths are palmed off as ho-hum nonevents because the government's spin doctors say the minister has fixed the problem by announcing more money and staff. Such a belief is not just dangerously naive but insulting to the bereaved families who are still waiting for answers.

There is a crisis in the Ambulance Service, not just pressure as the Premier claims. Many good ambulance officers have been burned out and have got out. Despite the government's claims of additional resources with the ambulance levy and despite its claims of having improved the system the proof is the opposite. We the state National-Liberal coalition believe an inquiry into the Ambulance Service is needed to identify the real solutions rather than this trite defence that if we continue to raise these concerns somehow that is being critical of those very officers who are out there trying to do their best. That is just wrong.

For example, we know that there are stressed out officers and when they get out due to stress they do not find support from the government and the bureaucrats. In fact, they find they are penalised in the courts. There is no support system for the stressed out officers who face the difficulties that are unfolding in the Ambulance Service.

There are other lessons to learn from the Dr Patel saga when it comes to the crisis in the Ambulance Service. The real issues are not just about one person's failure but that the health system was so sick it could not address the systemic problems we have with announcements of more staff and more money. The same is true of the ambulance system. System failures need not only more resources but also better management and care for the staff who have been failed by those who lead them.

Too many good ambulance officers are leaving in increasing numbers because the system is failing them and in turn failing Queenslanders who depend on an ambulance service, which we want to see returned to being a national best and a world-best service. As I have said, we acknowledge the outstanding and dedicated work of so many ambulance officers and support staff working in desperately difficult circumstances. Yesterday in the parliament I mentioned the story of Vito Catenaro and I thank his

wife Silvana for being willing to talk publicly about this event. I know the Catenaro family and the pain they have gone through since Vito, 39, collapsed in June last year. His wife rang the ambulance for help. Mrs Catenaro wants answers but also some assurance that in speaking publicly something will be done to truly fix the problems so their story is not repeated for others. But that assurance has not been met by the government's response so far and certainly will not be achieved by its claims in the parliament tonight.

The Catenaro's home was only five to eight minutes from an ambulance station in Brisbane and on the fateful morning that this 39-year-old man collapsed it took 30 minutes for an ambulance to arrive, and it was not the first ambulance dispatched but rather it was the second ambulance that got there because Mrs Catenaro found that the first one had driven past their home—and she saw it drive past—and she found out later that it had been diverted to another call. When Vito Catenaro stopped breathing, the communications centre, according to Mrs Catenaro, was unable to provide CPR advice because the computer had broken down and the operator had lost the on-screen advice about what to do. Whatever the reasons for this series of errors, she has asked about the training that has been put in place since then to address this and what systems there are to guarantee that if one error happens it does not escalate into a situation where events such as this happen. They are still waiting for answers. We have not heard any answers with the government's assurances that it is spending more money and there are more staff, because the same problems are occurring. It is time for an independent inquiry to truly address this issue and bring real solutions forward.