



Speech by

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MEDICAL EDUCATION

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (10.12 pm): I rise in the House tonight to speak about medical education in this country and some of the concerns I and the Queensland coalition have about Queensland's commitment to the quality of healthcare and medical education in our state. The Australian Medical Students Association, AMSA, contacted my office at the end of last year because they felt their calls for state and federal governments to provide increased support to medical students in Australia were falling on deaf ears. Among their most serious concerns was a lack of clinical training places in our hospitals to support our future doctors, as well as a lack of medical academics committed to educating the next generation of doctors.

In Queensland, and indeed throughout the country, we are currently experiencing a gross shortage of doctors. This shortage is placing even more pressure on our underfunded hospitals and overworked doctors and nurses, who somehow manage to keep our ailing public health system afloat. In the Queensland health system, medicos are working unreasonably long hours in conditions the Davies report damned as bleak. Even our medical students are feeling the strain. I was horrified to read in the *Sunday Mail* last week a trainee surgeon admit she feared she would kill a patient because she was routinely forced to operate on patients when she was 'so tired she felt drunk'.

Why do we ask our doctors and medical workforce to do things that we have made illegal for truck drivers? When I hear of such stories I can see why staff retention in Queensland Health is abysmally low. The Queensland coalition will continue a campaign for safe working hours for all of our medical workforce. But, according to AMSA, junior doctors working excessively long hours on relatively low pay are among the lucky ones. Some students struggle to even get a placement because resources are so tight and medical teachers are so thin on the ground. Today's medical students are not being afforded the vital learning opportunities they need to become high-quality medical practitioners, which is going to have serious repercussions on our health system for generations to come.

The Forster review into the state of the fledgling health system concluded that the acute shortage of doctors being experienced across Australia is a direct result of the federal Labor government's ill-fated decision to slash medical student intakes in 1995. Thanks to the Commonwealth coalition, there has been a band of initiatives implemented in the past few years designed to increase the number of students entering medicine, of which we are now beginning to reap the rewards. In 2005 three new medical schools were opened in Australia, and I am happy to say that two of those were on the Gold Coast. By 2012 the annual output of medical schools will increase to around 2,285 graduates, compared to 1,300 in 2000. This is a positive step towards addressing the undersupply of doctors in Australia, and we should be supporting the federal government and the universities in creating more places for medical students.

The challenge for the state government will be generating sufficient intern positions to cater for this most welcome influx of medical students in Queensland. We must not mirror the mistakes made in the UK where thousands of junior doctors cannot find training positions. The state government needs to assure Queensland patients that our doctors will not be lost to other states because there are not enough training and education places in our hospitals. The health minister needs to take action immediately to ensure these intern places are available from next year.

Time expired.