



Speech by

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TOOWOOMBA ACUTE MENTAL HEALTH UNIT

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (11.49 am): My matter of public interest today is to do with Toowoomba's acute mental health unit and a recent headline in the *Toowoomba Chronicle* stating 'Senior staff reveal a system in crisis'. If the problems pervading the Queensland health system were not so widely recognised throughout the state, this most recent in a raft of damning newspaper headlines may have referred to any number of places. But once again the endemic and systemic problems of our health department under the management of the bureaucratic Beattie government are being aired on prime time TV and newsstands across Queensland. Scratch beneath the surface of the health minister's inaccurate and misleading facade of a health system on the mend and you find the surfeit of problems identified by Davies, identified by Morris, identified by Butler and identified by Forster still simmering.

The insidious problems that plague Queensland Health under this government are boiling over, and nowhere is this more evident than in Toowoomba. That is where the story behind the latest headline begins. One of the greatest minds of the 20th century, Albert Einstein, identified insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Yet this seems to be the Premier and health minister's solution to fixing the embattled health system—a health system which in their nine years of government they have run into the ground. The latest casualty of this government's inept formula is Toowoomba's acute mental health unit. Last week the health minister prescribed a series of interim measures to mend the acute mental health unit at Toowoomba Hospital where allegations of bullying, of cover-ups and of rape run wild in the wards. The health minister will not wait for the Toowoomba district mental health service review, due to be completed this month, to start fixing the system but he continues to deny there is a crisis. In fact, he is on record in the *Toowoomba Chronicle* denying these problems even exist.

I say to the minister that it is an insult to the staff, to the patients and to the whistleblowers to dismiss their cries for help. Toowoomba's mental health unit is a tragedy waiting to happen and, sadly, I dare say it will happen while this Labor government only makes a rhetorical commitment to mental health services in Queensland. The allegations that have arisen from Toowoomba's acute mental health unit over the last few weeks are disturbing and, at worst, are downright dangerous. The final straw for many staffers who have been silent to date for fear of losing their jobs was an event that occurred on 23 March which has all too conveniently been swept under the rug. A patient has claimed rape, yet the hospital and now it seems the police are dismissing it as consensual. It is absurd to think a patient seeking treatment for a psychological condition in a hospital is in any position to consent to abuse.

I have been informed investigations into the incident are, at best, inadequate. DNA was reportedly never even taken. This incident has devastated the young victim and her family, and quite frankly the minister's response to the incident has been cold and clinical. The trend of this Beattie government, which has eroded Queensland's health system to the point where such crises are not shocking but rather unfortunately predictable, has been a technique that does nothing but support bureaucracy and inaction. It starts with the spin. Hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars are spent by this Labor government on puffery and catchphrases designed to convince Queenslanders that the health system, and indeed every system overseen by this government, is operating efficiently.

The health minister's statement of 12 April claiming mental health reforms were underway is evidence of the Labor government's spin cycle in action. The key objectives outlined in the minister's press release—providing advice on clinical priorities, providing advice on improving workplace culture and providing a forum to identify and resolve issues regarding the implementation of endorsed recommendations arising out of the review, to name a few—are not new initiatives of this government. In fact, the minister has flagged another review which seems to be a favourite diversionary tactic of the bureaucratic Beattie government to deflect attention away from the real problem and form an illusion that it is taking action. So we get the spin, the promises of more money, a committee or commission or a review or an audit, and we get someone who is not connected in any way to the problem to apologise and accept responsibility, distract and divert attention, dismiss and ignore and wait for the immediate problem or crisis to diminish in interest or media coverage and develop an action plan or strategic approach to a problem.

We are seeing this formula being followed again today by the minister, who has announced a review into the employment of unregistered doctors at Cairns Base Hospital. If some of the things that he is looking for are a review that will produce recommendations about the status of medical observers in Queensland Health facilities in their scope of practice, I say to the minister: medical observers do not have a scope of practice! They are not registered! They should not be employed! In terms of the next recommendation he is looking for—that is, recommendations about the process that should occur when an employee is found not to be appropriately registered—do not employ them! You do not need a review to find out that as observers they should not be practising. We have had Davies, Morris, Butler and Forster. Each of these reviews into Queensland's appalling health system layed down a raft of recommendations on to how to really fix this system. These recommendations and others have been shelved by this do-nothing government which is more interested in temporary bandaid solutions than committing to a long-term cure for the system.

Time expired.