



Speech by

Peter Wellington

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

MEDICAL POSITIONS

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (5.28 pm): Unfortunately, the member for Tablelands is not yet in the chamber so on behalf of the crossbenches it gives me a great deal of pleasure to move the motion which was tabled in the House this morning. I repeat it for the benefit of members who may not have been focusing on the importance of this very important motion which we will be debating for the next hour. I move—

That this House—

1. Acknowledges the need for more Queensland trained doctors, dentists and allied health professionals; and
2. To achieve this outcome, this House calls on the Queensland Government to take all necessary action to provide for 200 additional scholarships or bonded positions each year in the fields of medicine, dentistry and allied health professionals for graduating students from Queensland schools, with a condition of the scholarship or bond being that they perform the first five years of their service in Queensland public hospitals outside of the Brisbane metropolitan area.

Although there are a number of very important issues concerning Queenslanders at the moment, we on the crossbenches have put forward this motion in an attempt to ensure that health services remain clearly at the top of the agenda of matters discussed in this parliament and that all politicians are focused on the importance of delivering health services in Queensland and, more importantly, that our senior health bureaucrats also focus on the importance of this issue and do not allow themselves to be distracted by other issues involving local government, although we acknowledge that they are very important issues as well.

In the budget papers I note that the minister referred to the significant progress in the renewal of Queensland health systems and objectives following the referral of the action plan. The minister further referred to how the Queensland public health system continues to face a number of significant challenges and that demand for health services is increasing as a result of population growth, ageing and chronic disease. The minister further said that to meet this demand Queensland Health will continue to actively recruit, retain and develop its health workforce and to plan for and provide hospital and community based services that meet the needs of our populations. We agree with that very important statement made by the minister.

This motion is about exploring a number of strategies to assist in responding to Queensland's demand for health services. I acknowledge that in this year's state budget the Health portfolio was allocated \$7.151 billion—a significant amount of money in anyone's language. During the recent debate on the estimates committee report on the Health portfolio, reference was made to the minister's new funding model which proposes to distribute funding on the basis of the health needs of Queenslanders and link funding with hospital activities rather than on the basis of historical funding decisions.

In speaking to this motion and the proposed changes to the funding model for state hospitals from the historical funding basis to a needs basis, my comments are based on my experience on the Sunshine Coast and through my dealings with the very important and very strategic Nambour General Hospital. The Sunshine Coast is a rapidly growing area and our public hospitals are under enormous pressure all the time.

In the past when I have lobbied for more funding so that the necessary health services in a rapidly growing area could be increased I have had to fight the former funding model. Yes, I have had to fight that former funding model that was referred to during the estimates committee hearings. To me, the former funding model clearly did not provide an appropriate capacity for Queensland Health to fund our rapidly growing region. At long last I believe our Sunshine Coast hospitals, particularly the Nambour General Hospital, will be able to more easily put their case for funding increases to enable them to provide the range of services necessary in such a rapidly growing region. I thank the minister for changing the funding model. I believe the new proposal that he has put forward will provide a much better opportunity to meet an ever increasing need for health services.

This motion refers to the need to train more doctors, dentists and allied health professionals. We on the crossbenches specifically identified those three classes because too often when we talk about health we focus our attention on doctors. Dentists and allied health professionals are just as important. Our allied health professionals play a very important role in ensuring that our health services are delivered. While a doctor or dentist may perform an important operation, the patient's recovery and often early discharge from hospital would not be possible without the necessary services of the allied health professionals. Too often, unfortunately, I believe our allied health professionals are overlooked when we discuss health services.

Recently I visited a school and I was shocked at the high level of extraction of teeth from the very, very young children at that primary school. I understand that the incidence of tooth decay has skyrocketed in recent years. It is not because of the significant population growth that we hear about; I believe it is because of the falling standards of dental hygiene in Queensland's young children—to put it more simply, the falling standards of our children's diet. It has been suggested to me that this has occurred because of the large amounts of sugar contained in the many drinks and foods that young children are consuming every day of their lives. Little do many of the parents know that some of the alleged health drinks and foods are full of sugars and are actually rotting their children's teeth. While some members on the government side might throw up their hands and claim that the motion is ridiculous and it cannot be funded in the budget, I personally believe the reality is that unless we can significantly change our community's attitudes and habits in relation to eating and drinking we will need to look at employing the number of doctors that this motion refers to.

Recently we saw how we were able to change community attitudes in relation to smoking. We can all recall how smoking was part and parcel of life. Many, many people in our community were smoking but today that has changed significantly. Through partnership between community and government we were able to see attitudes to smoking in our community change significantly.

In speaking to this motion, I urge members to focus on the importance of health services, to focus on the importance of the services that our doctors, dentists and professional allied health workers provide to the community, and I urge members to support the motion. I will now allow other members a chance to speak; I did jump to support the member for Tablelands.