



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Wednesday, 17 October 2007

MOTION: HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (6.14 pm): The member for Cleveland and members opposite are not even close to being in any arena when it comes to health. They are all talkers and no doers—all talkers, no doers. I gladly rise to support my shadow health minister's motion and take this opportunity to publicly express my gratitude to the overwhelming majority of nurses, doctors and allied health workers who, even though they are spectacularly mismanaged and criminally underresourced by this Labor government, still find a way—

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Burnett, I would ask you to withdraw that unparliamentary language.

Mr MESSENGER: I withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER: I warn you not to use that language again in your speech.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your direction. They still find a way of working miracles every day and saving the lives of sick Queenslanders. My message to these health miracle workers is hang in there! Keep fighting! Your patients and their families depend on you. The conservative coalition—National and Liberal, both state and federal—appreciate your work. We understand just how much of a crisis our state system is in, unlike those opposite who have proved that tonight.

At the Bundaberg Hospital where the meltdown in our state public health system became public, staff are still forced to mix children with adults in the paediatrics ward. Accident and emergency patients are forced to wait in hallways for six hours before they are allocated a bed. Recently a 70-year-old cancer patient from Baffle Creek was asked to leave the hospital at two in the morning. There is a six-year dental waiting list. As of April 2007, the total number of patients waiting for elective surgery by surgical specialists at the Bundaberg Base Hospital totalled 459. As of 1 April 2007, 71 patients were waiting for urgent category 1 surgery, 211 patients were waiting for semiurgent category 2 surgery and 177 patients were waiting for non-urgent category 3 surgery. At the same time last year, 64 patients were waiting for urgent surgery as opposed to this year's total of 71.

Parliamentary Library research shows that there are approximately 35 palliative care beds funded in public hospitals in Queensland—35! Of those, the majority are located in rural and regional areas where some hospitals provide one of their beds for palliative care patients. I was informed by parliamentary research that of the 900 beds at the Royal Brisbane Hospital none are available for palliative care. Of the 750 beds at the Princess Alexandra Hospital none are available for palliative care. There are four palliative care beds at Logan Hospital and Mount Olivet Hospice has 18 public palliative care beds and 10 private beds.

In the Southern Health Service Area the state government spends approximately \$500,000 on palliative care. The federal government spends approximately \$3.1 million to \$3.7 million on palliative care in Queensland's Southern Health Service Area. This is a disgrace! The federal government outfunds palliative care by over 600 per cent. We have a plan to reduce the wastage of government health funds, and the bedrock of that plan has been articulated by the Prime Minister. The federal coalition government's proposal to give greater powers and responsibility to local hospital boards is great news for Queensland

and the Bundaberg-Burnett community. Currently, local health boards or councils have been stripped of their powers; all orders come out of Brisbane. John Howard's plan will reverse that dangerous trend of centralisation of power in Brisbane and give the power, responsibility and accountability back to the people of Bundaberg and Burnett.

Local health boards will have real authority over Queensland Health bureaucrats such as chief executive officers. Under John Howard's plan, nurse whistleblower Toni Hoffman would have stood a greater chance of uncovering the truth and saving lives at Bundaberg. Toni gave a letter of complaint and warning to the CEO of the Bundaberg Hospital in October 2004, but that complaint was not acted on for at least five months. How many lives could we have saved if we had a health board which controls the CEO rather than the other way around? Under Mr Howard's plan, the medical specialists and responsible local people on that board would have had the information to blow the whistle. Kevin Rudd—who we all know is the leader of the political party which hired Patel, covered up for Patel, flew Patel out of the country and has failed to get him back—visited Bundaberg Hospital to announce his plan to fix our local health crisis. How can we trust Kevin Rudd when this government has not delivered on the promises that it has already made—a \$41 million upgrade and 30 new beds?

Time expired.