



Speech by

Hon. Stephen Robertson

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard Wednesday, 7 February 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Doctor Fatigue

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (10.17 am): Doctor fatigue is an issue being taken very seriously by the Beattie government. Doctors have historically worked long hours in hospitals right around the world. We recognise, however, that in the 21st century health system this culture is changing for the wellbeing of both doctors and patients alike. That is why we are working with unions and the AMA to develop safe, workable and sustainable solutions to doctor fatigue. Last November I launched the \$3.6 million Alert Doctor Strategy to develop a new comprehensive system of safeguards and controls to reduce the incidence of doctor fatigue.

As part of this project, we are working with the University of South Australia's Centre for Sleep Research to develop an evidence based fatigue risk management framework for our hospitals. Next month researchers will begin work with doctors at 13 public hospitals throughout the state to monitor working hours and trial an interim fatigue risk management framework. The findings from these trials will be used to implement new statewide fatigue management throughout Queensland Health within 18 months. In the meantime, Queensland Health already has in place fatigue reporting arrangements which allow doctors to report fatigue instances and require supervisors to assess and manage the risk of current and future fatigue instances. For example, it is now mandatory for all doctors to report immediately to their supervisor if they have worked 13 continuous hours. Medical managers must also review the rostering and work arrangements of junior doctors to ensure work practices that may lead to fatigue risks are managed.

We are working with unions on a new continuous hours policy to address fatigue related risks from doctors working long hours, including processes to be followed if a doctor is engaged in 16 hours of continuous work. The systematic reporting of excess overtime hours and fatigue penalty payments for doctors who cannot access an eight-hour break between shifts is also starting to pay dividends. Early results suggest that there has already been a reduction in reportable instances with overtime episodes down from 227 to 176 and fatigue penalty payments down from 207 to 175 in just one month.

Doctor fatigue is a complex issue and there are no quick fixes. That is why the Beattie government will continue to work closely with the medical profession and unions to develop multifaceted solutions to the complex issues contributing to doctor fatigue.