



Speech by

Hon. Stephen Robertson

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard Thursday, 8 February 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Emergency Departments

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (9.59 am): Our public health system is treating more Queenslanders every quarter. Last week's Queensland Health performance report was further proof that our hospitals are busier than ever before. Nowhere are the unprecedented challenges of a growing and ageing population more pronounced than in our emergency departments. New figures show that Queensland public hospital emergency departments treated a record 854,266 people during 2006. That is over 14,000 more emergency department patients than during 2005, and it is over 168,000 more patients than during 2000, representing a 24.5 per cent increase in attendances. On current trends, I would expect our emergency departments to be treating over a million people every year by the end of the decade.

Two of our busiest hospitals last year were in the north, with Townsville's ED attending to more than 54,000 patients, 7.8 per cent up on the previous year, and Cairns treating more than 35,000, a 6.8 per cent increase. The biggest jump was recorded in Redcliffe, up eight per cent on 2005, with over 45,000 patients, which was caused in part by the temporary reduction in ED services in Caboolture. Bundaberg and Rockhampton also recorded solid increases as did both children's hospitals in Brisbane. Most other EDs in south-east Queensland were also up on 2005.

We are also finding that our EDs are generally treating more serious and complex cases which require more hospital resources and specialist staff. Overall, our EDs recorded an 8.9 per cent jump in category 1 cases. These cases are mostly life threatening and almost always require immediate resuscitation. They often require emergency surgery which puts pressure on hospitals' capacity to perform elective surgery. Category 2 and 3 cases increased by 6.1 per cent and seven per cent respectively, while the less urgent categories—categories 4 and 5—actually fell.

The dedicated staff in our public hospitals deserve our utmost praise for dealing with the extraordinary number of people flowing through our emergency departments. This demand will only continue to grow in future years, which is why our government has already commenced a massive capital works program in our health sector. Emergency departments from Cairns to the Gold Coast are being upgraded as part of the program. The final touches are being put on the Prince Charles Hospital's new general emergency department, which will open in a matter of weeks as part of a \$108 million redevelopment.