



Speech by

Hon. Stephen Robertson

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Specialist Outpatient Services

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (10.00 am): Last week I released the first ever comprehensive review of Queensland's specialist outpatient services authored by the former head of the University of Queensland's School of Medicine, Professor Ken Donald. I commissioned this review because I wanted to get a warts and all report on what was needed to improve patient access to, and the delivery of, specialist outpatient services.

The review found, amongst other things, that demand had grown significantly in recent years as patients turned increasingly to public hospitals for free specialist medical care. In fact in 2006-07 over 3.5 million specialist outpatient occasions of services were recorded by our public hospitals and outpatient clinics—which is almost the population of Queensland. This represents an increase of 7.2 per cent or 230,000 patients on the previous year.

One of the major reasons for this growth in demand is that an increasing number of families are forced to use public outpatient services because they cannot afford to see a private specialist. This is another area of Commonwealth responsibility and another area of Commonwealth failure when it comes to health care in this country. For example, when we consider that some out-of-pocket costs post the Medicare rebate for some specialist services have increased by between 125 and 180 per cent in the last three years alone, it is no wonder more people have no choice but to rely on our free public health system.

As Professor Donald noted, problems facing public outpatient services have existed for decades in Queensland but we are the first government to face up to them and the first government to do something about it. As a start, we have committed an extra \$20 million a year to treat an extra 50,000 patients annually and reduce the long waits people are experiencing. Already \$11.4 million has been allocated for individual health districts to provide more outpatient appointments. The remainder will be spent to achieve the other recommendations of the review, including working closer with the GP sector on managing specialist outpatients.

Queensland Health has started an audit on the current status of people waiting for an appointment which will be completed by the end of September. The department will then be writing to each patient who has still not yet had an appointment to check their current situation, see if their health status has changed since the initial referral and see if an appointment is still required. These are just a few of the actions being put in place to systematically respond to the report's 11 core recommendations. This is the latest initiative in our ongoing program of comprehensive reforms to our public health system as part of the Beattie government's \$10 billion Health Action Plan.