



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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MOTION: PUBLIC HOSPITALS

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (6.04 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to support the motion moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and condemn the amendment moved by the honourable health minister. We have the health minister in here making a virtue of the fact that we have 10,234 beds in the 2008-09 budget when he acknowledged himself this morning that in 1996 there were 10,163 beds. Those opposite now have a new nebulous definition of beds. The number of beds has gone up by 81 during a time when our population has increased by 20 per cent.

There is even an acknowledgement in the amendment moved by the honourable health minister that the government has increased bed numbers by 780 over the past two years which means that our bed numbers have gone down to just over 9,200. That is after eight years of the Beattie now Bligh government. The number of beds has decreased from 10,163 to obviously just over 9,200. That is a disgrace and obviously shows that its target was not providing beds but decreasing beds because of some core belief that the Labor Party may have had.

Earlier in this debate this evening the health minister quoted the member for Toowoomba South. I would like to have a look at something that the Premier said on 15 November 1995 in the matter of public importance debate. Anna Bligh, the member for South Brisbane, said—

Let me inform them—

that is the opposition—

that bed numbers is no measure of success; in fact, the opposite is true. The best way to determine whether the health system is working is to count the number of people not using the hospital system. Counting bed numbers means counting illness, not counting health.

Fairly obviously, back then the now Premier had a target and a plan—she has been speaking a lot about targets and plans over the last couple of days—not to increase bed numbers because, in her own words, 'bed numbers is no measure of success'. What did she think we should be doing instead. She stated—

The latter approach—

that is counting bed numbers means counting illness, not counting health—

shows that the community and preventative system is on track and that the health system generally is on track.

In 1995, the member for South Brisbane said her focus would obviously be on community and preventative health systems. Can I say that when I was at dental school community dentistry was a lovely part of dentistry. Preventative dentistry was a very nice part, too. But, when it really came to the crunch, the operative section of dentistry was the important part. Even though we try to prevent disease, every now and then we get disease. The only way to fix disease is with a drill, a light, some air pressure and a chair in which to put the patient. That is the equivalent of a bed in medicine. We acknowledge that prevention is helpful but we also need to make sure that we have a chair. That is the equivalent of having beds in medicine.

Clearly, the Premier's target and plan then was that her focus would be on community and preventative health systems when clearly we need to have the operative section of medicine improved by having more beds. The minister talks about there supposedly being as many beds now as there were 10 or 12 years ago when we have had a 20 per cent increase in population. We have had a negligible increase in beds, even allowing for the fact that there are different definitions of beds.

In the public hospital performance report the minister is always making great play about the fact that since June 2005 we have had a 35 per cent increase in doctors, a 24 per cent increase in nurses and a 28 per cent increase in allied health professionals. We welcome those but the point is: what can they do if they do not have beds to put people in? That is the focus of what has happened in our health system.

The plan back then was to keep our beds at the same number when everything else would need to be greater in number. We were going to need more ports, more water infrastructure, more teachers, more nurses, more roads, more hospitals but for some reason fewer beds. The Premier comes in here and says that we have 700,000 more people now and yet there are supposedly 1,100 fewer people on the elective surgery waiting list.

There are still 35,000 people on those waiting lists, and many of those are waiting longer than they should. It is a condemnation for this government that it can make a virtue of the fact that it has had a net increase of about 81 beds, allowing for different definitions, over 12 years and yet we still have the problems that we have, including at the Gold Coast—an area that concerns me greatly—where there are beds that are unused at the Allamanda Surgicentre and where pregnant women are being kept in cupboards and storerooms because there are no beds.