



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Wednesday, 16 April 2008

RICHMOND, AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (9.22 pm): I wish to speak on the appalling lack of an appropriate ambulance service at Richmond. This is an issue I first raised in my maiden speech—that Richmond needs a full-time ambulance station staffed by paramedics. As members are aware, the town of Richmond and its surrounding districts are still without a crew for its ambulance. As recently as 2 April this year, the director of nursing and a nursing student were forced to drive the ambulance on an emergency call-out despite the fact that they are completely untrained to drive the vehicle and that their absence on the 90-kilometre round trip left the hospital grossly understaffed. The memorandum of understanding at 13.1 states that the Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Health have no public liability insurance for the ambulance service. This comes on top of the Richmond Fire Service being given a hierarchy directive that it cannot drive the ambulance in an emergency. I ask: why are the lives of patients and nurses being put at risk because of the government's failure to provide basic health services, like ambulance crews, for rural and regional Queensland?

Queensland Health nursing staff should not be responsible for the government's failure to provide an adequate emergency response service. It is unacceptable for nursing staff to be called out at all hours of the night and leave the hospital unattended while they drive emergency ambulance vehicles on round trips of up to 400 kilometres on dirt roads and at times during the wet season and expect them to attend to accident victims in the quickest, safest time in order to save lives. This is the year 2008, and it is unbelievable that Richmond still has an ambulance service made up of unpaid volunteers and nursing staff who are required to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Richmond roads cover 1,500 kilometres, of which 80 per cent is black soil or gravel. If any volunteer drivers are recruited to drive the ambulance, they should be trained and paid.

It is not unusual for nurses to be called out to travel a 400-kilometre round trip, but this should be the responsibility of the Department of Emergency Services. It is appalling that calls for an ambulance station and paramedics to be based in Richmond have been thrown on the scrap heap. The community of Richmond disputes the minister's response that an appropriate ambulance service has not been provided because the ambulance call-out figures are a particular percentage. He omitted to mention the fact that many people drive their loved ones to hospital at all cost rather than disrupting the understaffed hospital. The Richmond Shire Council has called for a public meeting at the Civic Centre to look at the community's legal options to dispute paying the community ambulance levy for a service they do not receive. I support this call and I table the media release distributed by the Richmond Shire Council.

Tabled paper: Media release, dated 16 April 2008, by Richmond Shire Council, titled 'Ambulance Levy a Farce!'

The Richmond community pays an ambulance tax and this government has a moral and financial responsibility to provide a world-class, responsive, value-for-money ambulance service as promised by the Premier.