



Speech by
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MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL AND HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (3.20 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to this cognate debate. In particular, I would like to refer to a number of areas in which I have an interest. Health is such an important issue for all of us here in this House. It is an important issue for our families, for ourselves and for the general public. Consequently, we are spending \$9 billion on health this financial year and just a decade ago we were spending about \$3 billion. The amount of money that goes into this very important human rights issue is incredible, and I see the right to quality health as being a human right.

I see these bills not only delivering the services for people who are not well but also looking at the broader issues of prevention, protection and regulation. Looking at prevention, I applaud this bill that includes banning smoking in motor vehicles with children under the age of 16. It is quite remarkable to think that some people actually do light up in such a small environment as a car with children riding in it. I applaud any measure that prevents children suffering from involuntarily being exposed to very high levels of tobacco smoke in what we know are confined spaces. It is definitely a move in the right direction to ban such practices from occurring. In order to undertake cultural change as we did with the wearing of seatbelts, unfortunately we have to legislate it, educate the public and then police it. I very much welcome this provision in what I call a very important prevention part of the government's bill.

In relation to the second part about protecting the public, I also welcome mandatory reporting of misconduct of doctors. I think it is important that we introduce measures to protect the public against professional misconduct of medical practitioners. Mandatory reporting is one way, once again, that we can achieve the cultural change necessary to make sure that the public is protected when it comes to the practices of doctors. As I said, to achieve cultural change we start with legislation, we then move to education and then move to regulating and policing that particular piece of legislation.

I do not agree with members on the other side of the House who have said that somehow it exposes the doctors and it makes the workplace unworkable. When we are talking about cultural change, in my experience when something is mandatory and we provide a level playing field everyone knows exactly how they are required to act and it brings about a much more harmonious workplace than one where someone is intrepid or a bit worried about raising an issue or whistleblowing. They can get away in the workplace by raising areas of concern when they occur because the legislation, the employer and the law all tell them, 'I really have to do this as much as I really do not want to do it.' It is kind of a way of policing oneself and making sure that no-one is conducting themselves in a manner that is reportable.

As we know, reportable misconduct takes in a series of actions by doctors. This bill makes it mandatory that, if these things are witnessed or if people know about them, they must report them so that prevention strategies can be put in place. I think that goes a long way to protecting the public. It will actually cover the doctors rather than cause them to complain about it because they are able to say, 'Under the law, I have to take this action, and I am doing the right thing.'

The other part of protection is exceptions to the duty of confidentiality. I applaud this move. If we can protect children by having some exceptions in place, then I think the act strikes that right balance in

ensuring the protection, the safety and the wellbeing of the child and gives the director-general the ability to perform his or her functions and helps the Queensland Health lawyers effectively carry out their responsibilities. Changes to the act which enable the protection of children and the ability for us to carry out our duties properly is also very much a step in the right direction. I applaud changes to the bill along those lines.

I have worked in the area of workers compensation probably all of my union life—27 years. I know this area of the law backwards. I really do applaud the minister for introducing this. There are many instances where workers receive often minor injuries in the workplace. Allowing a nurse practitioner to issue a workers compensation medical certificate is a wonderful step in the right direction. This bill gives them that ability. They are generally the first on hand. If it is an injury that does not require them to spend time in hospital—and it might be sprains, soft tissue injuries such as strains, minor fractures, wounds or lacerations that they are treating—why should the nurse practitioner not be able to issue a workers compensation certificate that merely says, 'This injury was based on a work related injury'? The worker is then able to put in their claim quickly and effectively without the additional expenses of having to go to see doctors when, quite clearly, it is well and truly known that they have cut themselves or strained an ankle in the performance of the work they were employed to do. This is an eminently sensible step in the right direction. As I said, I applaud the minister for bringing it to this House. That provision relating to regulation is very important. I think it is one that will help injured workers greatly when they suffer minor injuries at work, which, unfortunately, occur nearly daily in workplaces.

The last area of regulation that I want to touch on is the health practitioner regulation national law. It makes eminent sense. It is extremely important for the health and wellbeing of the public to ensure that we have one national regulatory body overseeing doctors so they can cross over borders and operate anywhere in Australia. They have the same skill set; they are judged along the same lines. Having those national standards is something for which I have worked for many workers to achieve so that we do not have differing standards when workers want to move from one state to another. I really do applaud Queensland for being the host of this legislation that will create the scheme. Obviously this is a boost to public safety. We are protecting and ensuring that health practitioners are suitably trained and qualified, cutting red tape, establishing a single national register and simple registration processes, and establishing nationally consistent standards—all of those things together obviously will ensure that we have the best doctors in Australia. I support a national register. Anyone who does not really does not understand that Queensland is a small state and we need to have the best qualified doctors. These bills go a long way towards addressing that.

My congratulations go to the minister and his staff for bringing these amendments forward. They go a long way to implementing prevention, protection and regulation for the public. I believe they will bring about much of the cultural change that we often need in the very important area of health. I commend the bills to the House.