




Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Hansard Thursday, 12 May 2011

ATHERTON HOSPITAL, CANCER TREATMENT SERVICES

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (8.14 pm): On 9 March I tabled a petition of 2,000 signatories from Atherton Tablelands residents who were concerned that the chemotherapy services were being removed from the Atherton Hospital and that patients would have to travel to Cairns to receive the treatment. The minister's response to the petition assured patients that 'there are no plans to remove or reduce chemotherapy services at the Atherton Hospital'. While I welcome this response, the minister's words just do not stack up against the information being given to Atherton cancer patients.

I am told by numerous patients that they are being pressured to use the new oncology unit at the Cairns Base Hospital. This directly contradicts the minister's statement that the Atherton Hospital chemotherapy unit will not be reduced or removed, and I ask: why is this happening if there is no intention to curtail chemo services at Atherton?

The trip to Cairns from the Tablelands is causing many cancer sufferers hardship for a number of reasons such as parking problems and the lack of accommodation in Cairns. The only two routes to Cairns from the Tablelands are not travel friendly for cancer patients, the elderly or the vulnerable, particularly as many of these patients have to attend to a toilet stop halfway down the range that does not exist. I have met with patients who have to leave their homes at 4.30 in the morning to connect with the limited public transport available to Tablelands residents and do not return until 8.15 that night. It is unacceptable that patients who are seriously ill are feeling manipulated to endure travelling to Cairns when services are available in Atherton.

There is a contradiction between what the minister is saying and what is being reported by cancer sufferers, and this is causing unnecessary stress to people at the most difficult time of their lives. Patients deserve better. In his response, the minister also advised that patients who requested to be treated in Atherton would receive treatment at Atherton Hospital 'provided it is within the hospital's current service capacity framework'. I call on the minister to clearly define what services are within the 'current service capacity' of the Atherton Hospital. I call on the minister to investigate claims by Atherton patients of manipulation to use the Cairns oncology unit and to ensure that patients will be directed and encouraged to use the chemotherapy services available in Atherton. Finally, I call on the minister to give an ironclad guarantee that services currently available at the Atherton Hospital will not be reduced, withdrawn, downsized or relocated to Cairns.

I call on the Minister for Main Roads to flood proof the low-lying areas of Shovel Creek—'Shovel puddle'—and Gardiner Creek on the Flinders Highway, 60 kilometres west of Charters Towers. It only takes an inch and a half of rain to block off this major highway and bring the whole of Western Queensland to a standstill for days. It was only recently that most of the state had fine weather. However, it rained in the northern catchment and those creeks virtually closed down the transport of livestock and the mining industry. Travellers were left stranded for almost two days. I call on the minister to raise the levels of these areas a number of metres to resolve this problem once and for all.

(Time expired)