



Speech by


**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

Hansard Wednesday, 26 October 2011

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## **ATHERTON DISTRICT HOSPITAL**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (9.59 pm): I wish to raise an important issue relating to the lack of qualified and experienced doctors at the Atherton District Hospital. Recently Dr Martin Brigden retired from private practice after serving the Atherton community for 35 years. Dr Brigden has worked in the Atherton District Hospital one day a week for decades and since retiring has offered his specialist services to Queensland Health as a public physician at the hospital. However, Queensland Health has failed to reach a decision by its own deadlines of 14 and 18 October.

It is disturbing that there has been so much delay in sanctioning Dr Brigden's appointment. Consequently, the community and the medical fraternity are understandably anxious to retain vital specialist services. It is concerning that Queensland Health continue to ignore Dr Brigden's offer and, worse still, if his offer is rejected then Dr Brigden will have to take his skills and expertise elsewhere.

This will have a massive impact on the Tablelands community as patients will have to travel to Cairns or further afield for treatment. There is a shortage of specialists in rural areas and Queensland Health is extremely fortunate that Dr Brigden put his hand up to once again serve the community through the Atherton District Hospital.

I am advised that Dr Brigden performs approximately 500 general procedures yearly and several local GPs carry out anaesthetic services for these procedures. If this service is lost to Cairns then GP anaesthetists will not be able to continue as GP anaesthetists. These private GPs also provide private and public after-hours emergency cover for Queensland Health. This loss would put a big load on the Atherton District Hospital.

In 30 years Tablelands specialist physician numbers have gone from one to two. That welcome addition only occurred when Dr Brigden agreed to give up half his public position and additional Commonwealth funding became available. In the Far North we are all aware that services and facilities at the Cairns Base Hospital are extremely stressed and overburdened and additional referrals from the Tablelands will only serve to increase waiting times, increase the costs of the patient travel subsidy and increase patient transfers for the region as a whole.

The failure on Queensland Health's part to respond to Dr Brigden's offer gives the community the impression that there is a lack of regard for the standard of health services in this region. Further procrastination will jeopardise a great opportunity to secure the continued services and skills which Dr Brigden brings as a professional. It is essential that Queensland Health presents a clear plan to deliver a high standard of continued health services to the Tablelands and takes advantage of Dr Brigden's offer to continue to provide valuable specialist expertise in the Tablelands community.