




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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ADJOURNMENT

Physician Assistants

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (2.29 am): I rise to speak on a matter of utmost importance to people in rural and remote communities. For a number of years medical professionals such as Dr Dennis Pashen, who is the Director of James Cook University's Mount Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health, have pushed for a new rural medical generalist qualification—not for doctors or nurses, but for physician assistants. Currently we have a cohort of physician assistants studying at James Cook University who will be ready to graduate at the end of next year, December 2014. We also have two cohorts of PA graduates from the University of Queensland—30 in total. I understand there are some barriers to them working in the public health sector at present pending sign-off of policy from the government. Some of these outstanding issues that need to be resolved include the application for scope of clinical practice, clinical supervision and practice report, generic physician assistant experienced job description, general physician assistant graduate job description, PA competencies, PA governance guidelines and practice plans.

I am raising this matter as I have been approached by several PA students and graduates who are concerned about the delay in approval to work in the public health sector in Queensland. We have a desperate need for this kind of rural medical generalist in rural and remote areas in my electorate where it is virtually impossible to get doctors to stay. I am pleased to say that the minister took a meeting with me this week and advised that positive steps have been made in this direction and they are working towards having these issues resolved, and I am very grateful for that.

A physician assistant, or PA, works under the oversight of a medical practitioner, filling in the gaps between nurse practitioners and doctors. They pose no threat to the medical system but are an adjunct to the system, enhancing and strengthening what we already have in place. The degree is structured to only accept students who already have a background in medicine whether it be paramedic, nursing or some other field of medicine. So the students already have a medical background. The PA degree simply channels them into the kind of skills needed for rural and remote areas.

I understand that the government framework and employment arrangements for physician assistants to work within the public health system have been developed. For the sake of the graduates who are ready and waiting to work in the public sector, for the sake of many hospitals and health services, many of which are ready and willing to take on PAs, for the sake of those PA students currently studying and due to graduate next year and not least for the sake of rural and remote patients, resolution of any outstanding policy issues would be greatly beneficial. It seems we have part of a solution to our rural and remote doctor shortage in this way. I know there will be problems further down the track with Medicare and PBS funding, but that is for the federal government to sort out. We can make a start by granting approval and resolving these outstanding issues to get these PAs into the system.