




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Queensland Health, Senior Medical Officers Awards

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (11.54 am): Recently senior medical officers in the Cairns and hinterland health service advised that they are willing to walk off the job in July due to this government's appalling approach to workplace award negotiations. The 'take it or leave it' approach taken by the minister has left senior doctors with no choice. Medical officers negotiating the SMO awards have admitted that there have been issues with some doctors not fulfilling their obligations under the right to private practice allowance and have expressed their willingness to work with the government to resolve those issues, but the minister is using the Auditor-General's findings as an excuse to completely remove hard-fought award conditions. That is an issue that needs to be resolved, but this government is using that issue as an excuse to force doctors to accept conditions which remove their right to contest unfair dismissals and gives the government the power to change wage and work conditions without notification.

Rather than work through this issue in a fair and cooperative way, the government has thrown the baby out with the bathwater again and is now threatening the stability of the entire health system. The conditions in these individual contracts for senior medical officers are simply another way that this government is giving itself draconian powers to change the work conditions of Queensland Health workers without notice or due process. This is a pattern that defines this government. The laws that have been passed in this place since 2012 have steadily transferred power to the executive in all areas. Whenever this government does not get its own way, it simply changes the rules. This is not effective governance and it demonstrates a petty approach which has dark implications for the future of Queensland. This is an ideologically driven move that is consistent with the thought that people should not have access to a free health service.

One of the great achievements of Australian history is a free education and access to free health care, and that must be cherished and protected at all costs. Senior medical officers in the Cairns and hinterland health service district have advised that they will walk off the job on 1 July if they have to work under the new contracts. The minister's refusal to re-enter negotiations shows an alarming lack of care for patients and communities that will be affected by this action. The biggest impact will be on our overstretched emergency departments. Patients from the Tablelands may end up in the Cairns emergency department if senior emergency doctors reject these contracts and go into private practice. Maternity services will also be highly impacted, as will every other area of the Queensland Health system.

Doctors are professionals. They do not have to work in Queensland Health. There is work around for them in private practice, and that is why it is very important that we enter negotiations with them. They have trained for over seven years in an area that is very important to the health and quality of life of Queenslanders. This government is treating doctors with contempt and, as I mentioned before, these doctors do not care because they are about to walk out of the health system

because there are jobs available all over Australia. If the government does not do something about this and enter into arrangements and agreements with these doctors, we will possibly see a crisis.

This arrogance is not only extremely damaging in the short term but creates long-term issues as more and more senior staff go into private practice due to the instability these conditions bring into the workplace. As Queensland Health struggles to fill senior positions, the first place to lose doctors will be the bush. The hardest hit will be rural and regional Queensland. I implore those MPs in rural and regional areas to stand up and represent rural areas and stand up to protect the ability of the rural health system. It is as simple as that. I hope that the government comes to its senses and enters a reasonable negotiation, because these doctors are not asking for anything different. Rather, what they are asking for is the simple economic bargaining process that they worked under in the first place. How hard is that? I bring this issue to the attention of the House.