




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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ADJOURNMENT

Visiting Medical Officers

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (1.33 am): Two years ago I believe state parliament witnessed an unjust and unfair attack on visiting medical officers working in our public hospitals. I remind the House that VMOs are doctors in private practice who provide several hours a week of their time to help treat patients and play a vital role in the education of junior staff in our public hospitals. This non-unionised workforce comprises approximately 800 doctors across the state, many serving in rural and remote areas. *Hansard* records that on 20 August 2013 these VMOs were described as 'Tahitian princes'. It was also implied these VMOs were engaged in white-collar crime and were 'ripping the guts out of the health system to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars', yet a subsequent report from the Auditor-General offered no criticism of VMOs.

It is reasonable to expect a government to offer a guide in direction and opinion, influence the community positively and set an example. In that way we parliamentarians earn the support of the community. Abusing the platform that has been provided to us by our constituency to contest the professionalism of VMOs while refusing to accept the consequences is not leadership. Furthermore, I note the VMO community believes it was given an inadequate response to the matter when the issue was raised during estimates.

VMOs enhance the medical profession by providing full-time medical specialist services throughout the state and are a valued employee group. I accept that parliamentary debate can at times be robust and challenging, however these statements should not remain as a permanent and unchallenged record in *Hansard*. I commend the leadership of members of this community who have been extremely proactive in their efforts to correct the mistake. They feel these comments reflect poorly on this parliament and eventually on the community. These officers are fundamental for the ongoing viability of quality health care in the state of Queensland, especially within rural areas. A change in our attitude as parliamentarians is mandatory if we wish to have the community view its leaders with respect.

Despite a parliamentary retraction having been sought, none has been forthcoming. I rise today to offer a correction. Our VMOs are a hardworking, professional and loyal group in our healthcare system. The description of VMOs given two years ago in this House is inappropriate. I hope to give this profession the dignity it deserves. I acknowledge it is going to take time to rebuild the trust of our VMOs. I do not expect trust to be rebuilt overnight, but I hope this serves as an adequate response for the wider community of VMOs. I believe an apology is long overdue.