




Speech By
Joseph Kelly

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (3.34 pm): I support the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I would like to start by placing on record my recognition of the police officers, firefighters, ambulance officers and all of those other groups of workers who have to deal with very traumatic situations. I have been on the 'cleaned up' side of things in hospital where patients have been through the emergency department. It is still quite confronting to be looking after people who have been through such traumatic situations. I can only imagine what it is like on the side of the road.

Like all nurses and doctors, I have an obligation to stop if I see an accident and render assistance. Whenever I do see an accident and pull up, I do not know what I am going to face. Thankfully for me I have never had to face anything too harrowing and serious. I can imagine that if you did that day in day out, not knowing what was at the end of a drive to an accident, it must be very challenging. This bill is a really important step because it is going to improve the chances of the effectiveness of treatment and rehabilitation. For that reason alone, it is an incredibly important step forward.

PTSD is a mental health condition triggered by a terrifying event, either experiencing it or witnessing it. In my roles I have probably had more experience with people who have experienced it. The first time I was aware of dealing with PTSD was as a nurse in the ICU at Greenslopes. Twenty-five years after the end of the Vietnam conflict we had patients regularly coming through the intensive care unit for other operations who were clearly suffering from PTSD and were under the care and treatment of the very good Keith Payne mental health unit at Greenslopes hospital. You could see the impact it was having on those individuals, their families and the broader community.

Also, during my time at the rehabilitation unit at the Royal Brisbane Hospital in particular, I dealt with people who had been through quite severe and significant workplace injuries, as well as car accidents and a range of other traumatic experiences. Again, that made me realise how debilitating PTSD can be for people. Fortunately, I think in that 12- to 13-year gap between working in ICU at Greenslopes and then at rehabilitation at the Royal there had been a lot of recognition of and work done in the area of PTSD. We have reasonably good diagnostic tools and we have some reasonably good evidence based treatments.

As with any disease process, universally you could say that early intervention is always going to improve your chances of better outcomes. That is certainly the case here. This parliament and the minister and the department have recognised this in some of the actions that have already been taken. In 2019 the parliament passed amendments to our workers compensation laws that required insurers to take all reasonable steps to provide claimants with psychological injuries reasonable treatment and support services while their claim was being determined. That was a really important step forward, making sure that people who are making a claim are getting access to counselling, support and medical

treatment. Further, the funded Workers' Psychological Support Service is another really important step forward in making sure that people who are seeking compensation or have been affected by trauma related to their working life have access to good support.

We know that not every single person who experiences trauma will go on to develop PTSD. There are a range of factors that will increase their likelihood of developing PTSD following a single or repeated exposure to traumatic events. One of the factors that I think is most prevalent to this bill is anxiety. According to the information from the Mayo Clinic, a person is much more likely to develop PTSD after a traumatic event if they have other mental health problems such as anxiety.

As a union official and in my dealings with constituents the process of making a compensation claim for any type of injury can be lengthy and can create anxiety, even when that process is going well. By taking a presumptive approach this legislation will remove a source of anxiety. When you combine that with the other measures that have been put in place by the government, such as the Workers' Psychological Support Service and the requirement for insurance companies to take early intervention, we will put people in a position where they will be able to seek access to early diagnosis and treatment. If we do that fewer people will develop PTSD, so this bill is a really important step forward in relation to preventing the anxiety that can contribute to the eventual development of PTSD.

I do want to comment briefly on the committee's recommendation around the DSM. It is a well-established tool that has been used in mental health and broader health settings for as long as I can remember. It is an extremely effective tool. It is evidence based. It is well supported across the disciplines and it is regularly reviewed and updated based on the latest evidence. It is the gold standard for diagnosing anyone in the mental health space.

While I respect the committee's views in relation to that, I do think it is important to put on record that the DSM is our basic diagnostic tool when it comes to mental health. We have to be careful with it because oftentimes people are out there identifying other diseases and claiming they are diseases when in fact that is not necessarily supported by the evidence and certainly not by the DSM. It is not a political document: it is a clinical document. It is well researched and evidence based, so I think it is good that we have not necessarily taken that recommendation on board.

I thank the committee for their great work. They have done a good job on this bill. I want to thank all of the submitters and I commend the bill to the House.