




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Sunshine Coast University Hospital

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (2.26 pm): Today I raise the effects of a toxic culture running through the wards of Queensland's newest and shiniest hospital—the Sunshine Coast University Hospital—and I will detail how bullying complaints and serious allegations were ignored by the hospital board, by Queensland Health and by the government. Under this government it was a culture that was rampant for almost three years. The Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service's performance has gone from bad to worse and it all started with mates helping mates while experienced staff walked out the door, no integrity, a culture of cover-ups and looking the other way.

Here are the facts: in April last year I submitted an RTI application about the behaviour of senior employees in the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service after being approached by multiple staff who told me of a dysfunctional workplace characterised by bullying, harassment and intimidation. They told me of their fear of reprisal by senior management and of a hospital system where patient care was suffering because of mismanagement at the highest levels. My RTI request was a simple one if the health service had nothing to hide. Six weeks after the RTI was submitted, then CEO Naomi Dwyer resigned. That is hardly a coincidence.

Here we are in February 2022—10 months since the request was made—and, after fighting tooth and nail to get the information that I requested a year ago, I finally have the results of the RTI. One document, a letter written to Dr John Wakefield, the Director-General of Queensland Health, stated it was a desperate plea for his direct intervention and help. It says—

The leadership of the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service continues to be in crisis due to the appalling behaviours and conduct displayed by the Chief Executive—

Naomi Dwyer—

and the Chief Operating Officer ...

The work environment was described as harsh, punishing, unreasonable, chaotic and increasingly dysfunctional and the letter states that this without a doubt is impacting the health service's performance and its people. The letter states there were serious failings in duty of care and no action was taken by the hospital board or Queensland Health despite them being aware of the issues. It says there is a pervasive, brutal culture of blame, fear and retribution. People were too afraid to make a complaint because, if the CEO or chief operating officer found out, their careers would be over. The threat was that real.

The person ends this damning letter with an appeal to the head of Queensland Health that CEO Naomi Dwyer and her chief operating officer have their contracts terminated immediately. They were not. We know this did not happen. In fact, Ms Dwyer resigned only after my RTI was submitted. She was given very public accolades on her way out. Here is what else we know: all seven of Ms Dwyer's executive level direct reports left the health service within the first 12 months of her being appointed

CEO. At least 24 senior staff members left the health service while Ms Dwyer was in charge. There is no way this went unnoticed. During Ms Dwyer's three-year reign, there were five different heads of the People and Culture Department—five different heads in three years!

Despite the rhetoric we heard this morning from the Attorney-General, last year two brave whistleblowers had their employment suspended. The CEO and the chief operating officer may have now left, but the effects from the toxic culture they created are still being felt. Thirty per cent of all elective surgery patients on the Sunshine Coast are not treated in time at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital. In fact, the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service has the worst two performing public hospitals in all of Queensland.

As the letter states, the working environment was 'without a doubt impacting the health service's performance and its people'. If only the hospital board and Queensland Health had acted when they were first made aware of the bullying and intimidation or when executives and high-level medical staff started dropping like flies. The health service is still struggling to attract experienced doctors because its reputation has been destroyed. That is why people such as Wendy Carter, from my electorate of Buderim and who was down here last year, has been waiting months, wheelchair bound and in severe pain, just to get an appointment—an appointment she should have had within 30 days. It is why two 12-year-old girls from my electorate have languished for months longer than they should have, waiting for surgery on their knees.

It is clear that the culture of cover-ups, which is so pervasive within this Labor state government, has resulted in Queensland Health workers being bullied, harassed and victimised. They and the Sunshine Coast residents that they care for deserve better. The toxic culture and failures of leadership that were allowed to fester in the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service for almost three years need to be exposed. The board, the Queensland Health leadership and the Minister for Health have all failed in their duty of care to Sunshine Coast health. This appalling behaviour and the cover-up that followed must be exposed to ensure that they do not happen again—not on the Sunshine Coast and not anywhere in Queensland. There must be accountability. I call on the Minister for Health to explain why neither she nor her predecessor, the Deputy Premier, protected health workers when they should have.