Question on Notice
No. 1400
Asked on 6 October 2009

MR MALONE asked the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services (MR ROBERTS) -

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise the total hours lost and approximate cost of ramping at hospitals (reported separately) by region for 2008-09, 2007-08 and 2006-07?

ANSWER:

Queensland Health reports quarterly on the performance of the 27 major public hospitals in Queensland. These 27 hospitals account for more than 80 percent of the emergency incidents of service across the state public hospital system. Wait times in our hospitals have improved, taking Queensland from sixth to third in the country.

The current agreed benchmarking measurement for off-stretcher times is from 15 minutes. The first 15 minutes following arrival of an ambulance to an Emergency Department are usually taken up by communication with the hospital staff regarding the patients' condition, ongoing treatment and ascertaining the timing of the transfer of the patient to a suitable treatment area.

For the 2008-09 financial year the average off-stretcher time across Queensland was 13 minutes for all cases. Around 72 percent of all patients were off-stretcher to hospital beds within 15 minutes. Around 92 percent of all patients were off-stretcher to hospital beds within 30 minutes.

The following data needs to be considered in the context that during 2008-09 Queensland paramedics were rostered on duty for around 3.6 million hours. Additionally, paramedics provide continuous pre-hospital care to patients prior, and up to admission to a hospital bed.

Region	Jan – June 2007		2007-08 financial year		2008-09 financial year	
	Hours above 15 mins	Hours above 30 mins	Hours above 15 mins	Hours above 30 mins	Hours above 15 mins (NB includes hours above 30 mins)	Hours above 30 mins
Northern	73	29	145	47	214	86
Central	62	30	168	77	223	86
South Western	65	22	168	65	229	93
North Coast	368	116	1,410	612	2,688	1,221
Brisbane	2,072	556	9,528	3,879	13,033	5,823
South Eastern	2,024	888	8,499	4,737	9,170	4,831
Far Northern	867	558	1,846	1,111	1,911	1,129

NB. 1. Amounts in the above table are cumulative hours
2. Data is only available from 1 January 2007, when the eARF system became operational on a state-wide basis

Despite increasing pressures on hospital emergency departments and ambulance services, QAS has maintained some of the best response times in Australia.

In the first quarter of 2008-09, response times were 8.6 minutes at the 50th percentile and 17.6 minutes at the 90th. In the first quarter of 2009-10 they had improved to 8.3 minutes and 17.1 minutes respectively, which is a significant improvement.

In 2008-09 74.87 percent of all QAS transports were taken to the 27 major hospitals. These hospitals account for 96 percent of all hours where a patient was on a QAS stretcher above 15 minutes on arrival at hospital.

While the QAS can be impacted by longer off-stretcher times, the impact is difficult to assess in monetary terms, as indicated previously in my response to QON 839 asked on 6 August 2009. The key performance measure for the QAS is the off-stretcher time.

The QAS continues to work with Queensland Health to improve off-stretcher times. The following initiatives have been implemented:

A supervision model trial has commenced in the Brisbane and South Eastern Regions where an Officer-in-Charge level supervisor will be at the four major Emergency Departments (EDs) seven days a week during daytime shifts. The supervisors are located at the Gold Coast, Logan, Princess Alexandra and Royal Brisbane Hospitals. The aim of the trial is:

- to ensure crews are turned around in a timely manner;
- liaison with ED staffs to ensure the impacts of access block are lessened; and
- to ensure accurate arrival and off stretcher times are recorded to improve the integrity of QAS data collection.

In Brisbane Region, QAS now has access to the Queensland Health Emergency Capacity for Hospitals Overview (ECHO) system which provides a real time operating picture of the status of emergency departments and available beds.

Clinical Deployment Supervisors in the Brisbane AFCOM Communication Centre have access to the ECHO system and are piloting its use as a tool to assist in load-sharing of patients being transported by ambulance to emergency department where practically and clinically appropriate to do so. It is envisaged the pilot will run in AFCOM for three to six months before rolling out to other communications centres.

The Commissioner QAS has also approved work to commence on an ambulance arrivals system with Queensland Health in appropriate Emergency Departments. This would involve a real time feed off the Emergency Services Computer Aided Dispatch system to enable emergency departments to see the current status of ambulances en route to, or at Emergency Departments.