

Question on Notice
No. 524
Asked on 23 March 2010

DR DOUGLAS asked the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health (MR LUCAS)-

QUESTION:

With reference to a methadone clinic at Nerang located in the busy Nerang Fair shopping centre and near two schools—

- (1) What public consultation has been undertaken regarding its establishment?
- (2) What criteria were used to decide its location?
- (3) What is the projected number of patients in 2010?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Gaven for his question.

I am advised that there is no Methadone Treatment Clinic in Nerang. The question may relate to a retail pharmacy in Nerang Fair Shopping centre whose participation enables the provision of a statewide opioid treatment service. This pharmacy has been participating in the Opioid Treatment Program since 1993 and been under the current management for the last two years.

This pharmacy services up to a maximum of 60 clients.

The Queensland Opioid Treatment Program has been operating since the early 1970s. The principle underpinning the model for opioid maintenance treatment in Queensland has been ready access on the basis of need.

Persons requesting treatment are either referred to an opioid treatment program by a medical practitioner or other health professional, or present at a program because they have made a decision to seek treatment for their opioid (usually heroin) dependence.

All new admissions undergo a comprehensive medical and psychosocial assessment where treatment options are explored. Once commenced on the program, the person attends a pharmacy and consumes an oral dose of methadone syrup/liquid or sublingual dose of buprenorphine. The person is assessed on a daily basis at the program until their methadone or buprenorphine dose is stabilised.

All patients, including those who appear to be doing well, have a periodic review where recent drug use, social functioning, and psychological and physical health are assessed. The aim of the review is to ensure that the treatment provided is meeting the patient's specific need, to ensure that clinical safety is not being compromised, and to provide an opportunity for the patient and clinician to discuss the patient's progress and treatment.

The use of approved retail pharmacies and public facilities in both metropolitan and rural areas has been vital in enabling the provision of a statewide opioid treatment service.

Since the early 1970s, the majority of patients on the Queensland Opioid Treatment Program have attended retail pharmacies in the community for supervision when consuming their opioid treatment medication. Pharmacists participating in the Opioid Treatment Program are required to supervise the consumption of methadone or buprenorphine on a daily basis and also attend to substantial paperwork associated with this dispensing and supervision.

Evidence suggests that community pharmacy dosing greatly assists in the process of 'normalising' the lifestyle of patients in the longer term. It enables patients to present to a pharmacy for their medication near to where they live or work and a large number of patients develop healthy relationships with their pharmacist.