

Question on Notice
No. 279
Asked on 22 March 2011

MR MESSENGER asked the Minister for Health (MR WILSON)-

QUESTION:

With reference to the long wait (up to seven months for one Burnett couple) parents have to endure in order to receive an autopsy report for their children who die during or just after childbirth -

- (1) Will the Minister detail for the House (reported separately for the last five years), by each Queensland hospital (including the Bundaberg Base), the number of autopsies which have been authorised on children less than one year old and the length of time it took for each autopsy to be delivered to the deceased child's parents?
- (2) Will the Minister also detail the medical resources, including staffing levels that Queensland Health has allocated for this important medical procedure?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Burnett for his question. The following information was provided to me by Queensland Health.

In Queensland, all autopsies other than coronial autopsies are requested by hospitals and undertaken by Clinical and Statewide Services which employ the paediatric and perinatal specialist medical staff who are properly credentialed and have an appropriate scope of practice for this service.

A total of 1031 non-coronial autopsies were performed in the last five years on children who were less than one year: 219 in 2006, 261 in 2007, 194 in 2008, 214 in 2009 and 143 in 2010. The average time to complete a report over this period was 121 days.

For the Bundaberg Hospital there were 36 non-coronial autopsies performed in this time, seven in 2006, 11 in 2007, six in 2008, nine in 2009, and three in 2010. The average time for a report was 54 days. This information was identified from individual records for the hospital.

In coroner's cases, the law requires autopsy reports to be sent to the coroner. Parents may apply for a copy of the report from the coroner. For most centres, in most years, the time taken to complete autopsy reports for coroners averaged less than five months, consistent with the national average. However, as previously mentioned, paediatric coronial autopsies can be amongst the most complex and time consuming type of case and for some centres the reporting time ranged up to approximately one year.

The medical resources required for coronial autopsies, including those of infants, consist of 17 specialist Pathologists state-wide, 10 salaried Forensic Pathologists employed full-time by Forensic and Scientific Services (four based outside Brisbane), and seven Pathologists paid per item of service by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The latter seven (all

based in regional centres) comprise four Pathology Queensland employees, and three private or retired Pathologists. An additional \$2 million has recently been allocated by Queensland Health to immediately increase staffing levels to reduce reporting times for all coronial autopsies.