

Question on Notice
No. 254
Asked on 1 April 2014

MR KATTER asked the Minister for Health (MR SPRINGBORG)-

QUESTION:

With reference to Senior Medical Officers (SMO) contracts—

Will the Minister (a) extend the 30 April deadline for the signing of the contracts, (b) redraft the contracts to enable doctors to practice ethically and (c) repeal the industrial relations changes that allow unilateral changes to be made to doctor's employment conditions?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Mount Isa for his question.

The Government is rebuilding Queensland Health, and individual contracts with senior medical officers are a critical component of the renewal underway. First announced last year in the *Blueprint for better health care in Queensland*, individual contracts are a giant leap forward for the organisation.

There have been issues, but the Government has listened to all of the concerns of senior doctors and has responded to each and every one with a solution.

As a result of recent discussions, a new consolidated contract will be issued which incorporates the contract addendum along with other enhancements negotiated and agreed with doctor representatives including the AMA and SMO Taskforce.

This will deliver the clarity that doctors have been seeking while also providing Queensland Health opportunities to improve healthcare service for its patients.

Senior doctors began receiving their consolidated contracts after the Easter break.

In consideration of the reissue of contracts and the need for review by doctors, the deadline for signed contracts to be returned to Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) has been extended to 31 May 2014, with the contracts to come into effect from 4 August 2014.

The contracts as offered encourage ethical practices by practitioners and ethical outcomes for patients at all times.

Clause 6(2) of the contract states: "The Medical Officer is subject to the reasonable directions of the Service in exercising or performing the Medical Officer's functions within their scope of practice. The Service respects the Medical Officer's professional ability to exercise clinical autonomy within their scope of practice." This ensures the current clinical independence doctors experience now continues under the contract.

Further, a commitment to protect senior and visiting medical officers from the previously unfettered power of the Director-General of Queensland Health was delivered to doctors by the Queensland Parliament on the evening of 3 April 2014.

Legislation, passed by MPs, provides doctors with unique and highly-valued life-long contracts to boost the performance of the Queensland public health system, with key protections backed by law. The Hospital and Health Boards Amendment Bill 2014 arose out of talks with senior doctors and delivers guarantees they sought in the discussions. The Bill guarantees to doctors that, once signed, their individual contracts cannot be varied to their detriment, without an Act of Parliament.

For doctors, this legislative change provides certainty and clarity. It puts an end to doubts and misinformation.

The Bill provides that a Health Employment Directive by the Director-General or an employment regulation cannot impact on a doctor's contract except in cases where increased remuneration or improved benefits (such as State-wide pay-rises) for doctors are provided.

Senior and visiting medical officers are urged to look closely at the Government's contract framework, to discuss the details with their HHS and to sign the new contracts by 31 May 2014.