

Question on Notice
No. 2149
Asked on 10 November 2016

MR BLEIJIE asked the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services (HON C R DICK) –

With reference to the Labor Government delay to the opening of the Sunshine Coast University Hospital to April 2017—

Will the Minister guarantee that the Sunshine Coast University Hospital will be open and fully operational including having a university signed up to deliver the tertiary training components by the end of April 2017?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Kawana for his question.

As the Member would be aware, the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Board decided in March 2016, to change the targeted opening of the new hospital to April 2017, to ensure patient safety.

The lessons learned from the commissioning of the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital informed the Board's decision.

The focus of the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service is on opening the Sunshine Coast University Hospital (SCUH) in a way that ensures patient safety and clinical services are of the highest standards.

I have been advised by all parties that progress of activities remains on track for the planned April 2017 opening.

I am also advised that from January 2017, more than 1000 students from the University of the Sunshine Coast and TAFE Queensland East Coast will be present on site. These students will be in the areas of nursing and allied health.

More than 70 medical students (years three and four) will also be on site as part of the existing clinical school arrangements with the University of Queensland.

If the Turnbull Federal Coalition Government does not allocate enough medical places, the SCUH will be the only hospital of its size in Australia to open without a medical school.

I am advised that to establish a viable medical school at the SCUH, 50 medical student places are required. The allocation of medical student placements is a Commonwealth responsibility. Queensland has already secured the transfer of 35 places from an existing allocation, but we still require 15 more places.

On 4 November 2015, more than one year ago, I first wrote to the Commonwealth Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham, asking him to support this medical school. The Commonwealth Health Minister replied on 17 December 2015, acknowledging the request. Not only is the allocation of medical students a Commonwealth responsibility, so is the funding of medical student placements.

On 8 March this year, eight months ago, I wrote again to Minister Birmingham and offered to fund 50 per cent of the cost of those essential 15 new places each year during the four-year transition phase. I also advised the Minister that we would guarantee a place to every one of the students graduating from the medical school in our state's intern training program, meaning more jobs for Queensland doctors.

Minister Birmingham has requested that I guarantee specialist training places. In my letter dated 8 March 2016, I gave Minister Birmingham my assurance that all students at the new medical school will be afforded opportunities for specialist training places. This is based on the projected growth and demand for medical specialists on the Sunshine Coast. However, this of course, would ultimately be determined by the respective colleges.

Specialist training colleges accredit our hospitals and determine the number of specialist training places the hospital can allocate. If the colleges accredit 10 specialist training places at a hospital, then the hospital allocates those 10 places.

I am advised that there are always vacancies in certain specialties that need to be filled.

I urge the Turnbull Government and Queensland State LNP members to support the Sunshine Coast by recognising the considerable partnership the Queensland Government is willing to offer by approving the necessary medical student places immediately.