



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Tuesday, 22 March 2005

BUNDABERG BASE HOSPITAL, INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (12.11 pm): For the protection of patients at the Bundaberg Base Hospital intensive care unit and the wellbeing of the medical staff I make public and table a letter from the nurse unit manager of the Bundaberg Base Hospital ICU. This letter alleges serious concerns relating to the behaviour and clinical competence of Dr Patel, an overseas trained surgeon working at the Bundaberg Base Hospital ICU. The letter submitted to the management of the Bundaberg Base Hospital on or around 22 October 2004 lists the cases of approximately 14 former patients of the Bundaberg Base Hospital ICU who the writer believed required formal investigations. I am astounded that the Minister for Health, as witnessed by his reply this morning to a question without notice from the shadow health minister, was ignorant of this investigation.

Some of the letter's allegations are as follows—

Soon after Dr Patel started operating here the nursing staff observed a high complication rate amongst patients.

Dr Miach refused to allow Dr Patel to care for his patients as he stated he had 100 per cent complication rate peritoneal dialysis insertion. This was stated in a medical services forum as well as in a private conversation with myself.

One patient ... developed haematoma in ward and attempted evacuation done without any analgesia. Doctors notes consistently say patient well when patient was experiencing large amounts of pain and wound ooze.

On 27 July 2004 a patient ... returned to ICU in extremis with a chest injury. Dr Patel interfered in the arranged transfer of the patient to Brisbane and the patient died after it was thought the retrieval team were on the way to retrieve this patient. The subsequent events of this intervention resulted in the ICU staff requesting advice from nurses union.

It is widely believed among the medical and nursing staff that Dr Patel was very powerful, that he was wholeheartedly supported by Peter Leck (Health Service Administration) Dr Darren Keating and untouchable. Anyone who tried to alert the authorities about their concerns would lose their jobs. This perception was indeed perpetrated by Dr Patel on a daily basis.

Dr Alex Davis and Dr David Risson were unsure of what to do because of the widespread belief Dr Patel was protected by executive.

An investigation, or a fact-finding mission, was launched to examine these claims and was carried out by Queensland Health's Chief Health Officer, Dr FitzGerald, approximately three to four weeks ago. As we have heard this morning, as yet no findings have been released. Staff are fearing a cover-up.

In order to restore confidence in the Bundaberg Base Hospital ICU, I call on the Health Minister to immediately release the findings of any report or fact-finding mission that has been conducted by Queensland Health. I also call on the Health Minister to launch immediately an independent, comprehensive review of the Bundaberg Base Hospital ICU and its administration. I challenge the minister to guarantee that all staff members who choose to give evidence be afforded full whistleblower status and that they be protected from any vindictive administrative action. Pending the results of this investigation the minister must immediately stand aside and suspend from work surgeon Dr Patel and senior administrative staff Peter Leck and Dr Darren Keating.

I have spoken with staff of the Bundaberg Base Hospital ICU who have said the following in response to being asked if they were scared—

I guess I'm more distressed than scared, because I've watched patients die and I have to—I feel that every time I see him—

referring to Dr Patel—

walk into the unit of I feel sick because I just think who's he going to kill now, what's he going to do now. And we all feel like that, all the nurses feel like that, they feel physically ill when he walks in because they just know that he's going to try and interfere with something, operate on someone and cause more of a problem and a complication, stop a transfer which has been arranged and transfers they're difficult things to arrange you know. Brisbane doesn't often have beds.

The staff of the Bundaberg Base Hospital ICU are desperate. Eight out of 18 nursing staff are on stress leave.

Time expired.