



House of Assembly

Thursday 29 September 2011

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (14:40): My question is to the Minister for Health. What health services are available to northern Adelaide residents and, in particular, emergency orthopaedic patients?

The Hon. J.D. HILL (Karna—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister for the Southern Suburbs, Minister Assisting the Premier in the Arts) (14:40): I thank the member for Light for his question; I know he has a great deal of interest in the health services in his community. The Gawler *Bunyip* newspaper this week ran a sensational front-page story about a local woman's need for emergency orthopaedic surgery on Sunday 28 August. The article quoted the patient's treating doctor and alleges that that doctor made a number of claims about the state's public health system. After discussions with my staff, *The Bunyip* forwarded questions to my office at 4.18pm on Monday 26 September. My staff provided oral advice on the same day and also detailed written responses at 12.44pm on Tuesday (the following day) that rebutted these claims. Despite advice from my office that much of the information was incorrect, *The Bunyip* did not include any advice from my office in the article published on the subsequent

Wednesday (the 28th), saying it was not received before the deadline.

Let me tell the house what was substantially told to *The Bunyip*. *The Bunyip* claimed that the doctor called the Lyell McEwin Hospital and was told that they did not have an orthopaedic surgeon working on Sundays. I am surprised that the doctor made that call because, if he practised in the northern suburbs—which he does—he would have known that the Lyell McEwin Hospital did not have an orthopaedic surgeon working on Sundays because the emergency orthopaedic service in the northern suburbs is run through the Modbury Hospital, and there is an orthopaedic team available there 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A patient from the north could also access services at the Royal Adelaide or The Queen Elizabeth.

A second claim in *The Bunyip* was that the doctor allegedly called The Queen Elizabeth Hospital and was told that they did not have any beds. I am surprised if the doctor was told that but, if he was, I would ask him to provide information so we can investigate that, because The Queen Elizabeth Hospital does have a 24-hour service for orthopaedic surgery and would not turn away emergency patients who were in absolute need. In fact, I am told that, on that very same day, another orthopaedic patient from Gawler was treated at The QEH.

The Bunyip also claims that the doctor said the Royal Adelaide Hospital did not want the patient because it was too far and they had no capacity. We are unaware of who the doctor allegedly spoke to but, once again, I would be very pleased to investigate it if he would like to tell us. But, once again, there is a 24-hour, seven days a week orthopaedic surgical service at the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

The Bunyip alleges that the doctor claimed Modbury Hospital was not an option because it did not have an orthopaedic surgeon at all. That is the claim that most riles me. The doctor claims that the hospital did not have an orthopaedic surgeon. The fact is that

Modbury Hospital has orthopaedic surgical cover 24 hours a day, seven-days-a-week. Modbury Hospital services the North East with orthopaedic surgery, performing a high volume of non-complex procedures.

I would expect that doctors working in that area would have known that. To make sure that they do, I have asked the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network to contact all doctors in the area to remind them of emergency arrangements in public hospitals. Equally, I would have thought that before making such claims *The Bunyip*, as a reputable newspaper, would have checked its facts by contacting the hospital. They contacted us, we gave them the facts, they chose not to run them.

Another claim is that *The Bunyip* claims the doctor had no other choice but to call an ambulance and send the patient to Flinders Private Hospital. All our public metropolitan hospitals have emergency departments that accept and treat emergency patients. If a hospital is busy, as I have already informed the house, they are given alternatives. But to say there was no other choice does a great disservice to the hard-working staff of our public hospitals. Our public hospital departments will always take in urgent patients, but clinicians will determine the order in which they are treated.

I also note that the patient in question had private medical insurance, so it was perfectly reasonable for them to go to Flinders Private. One of the benefits, of course, of having private insurance is that you have a personal choice about which hospital you go to and, in this case, the patient exercised that choice. I hope she is recovering well. I also reject claims published in the article attributed to the failed former Liberal candidate for Light, Cosie Costa, that the plan to make the Lyell McEwin Hospital the hospital for the north is not working. He is wrong and he is telling untruths about our healthcare system.

This government is undertaking major works at the Lyell McEwin Hospital, with a total

investment of \$339 million. These works are steadily transforming that hospital into one of the state's major acute hospitals. The first two stages have been completed and include: new and upgraded inpatient wards; a new emergency department, including extended emergency care unit; medical imaging; an intensive care unit; a high dependency unit; a coronary care unit; state-of-the-art operating units; a women's health centre; extension of pathology and pharmacy services; enhanced day surgery services; enhanced oncology services; and research space.

There were 189 available overnight beds on average at the Lyell McEwin in the last year of the former Liberal government. This has increased to 291 beds under this government. That means there are 100 extra beds than existed under the former government. The redevelopment works currently underway will add another 100 beds to that hospital, expanding the neonatal service, commission three theatres and add a helipad to the hospital. Under this government, the Lyell McEwin will almost double in size and become a major emergency, teaching and research hospital.

As more services come online at the Lyell, we have also added more staff. The number of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals has increased. In fact, there are 158 more doctors, 91 more allied health workers and 671 more nurses at the Lyell McEwin than when we were in opposition. It is outrageous enough that the opposition here make up stories about our health system, trying to gain political points on the basis of untruths, but when their failed candidates do the same thing in untested interviews with local newspapers I must say something. Gawler residents can also access public healthcare services, including surgical, at the Gawler Hospital, as well as the new Elizabeth GP Plus Health Care Centre another initiative of this state government.