

ADJOURNMENT

Gold Coast Hospital

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (4.40 p.m.)—I was contacted only yesterday by the son-in-law of a significantly ill woman who is and has been treated for two weeks by the Gold Coast Hospital. Obviously any stay in hospital is regrettable and one would hope that the hospital would be doing all it could for the health of their patient. Yet this gentleman had some disturbing news. His doctor informed him that the quality of the food being served at the hospital was actually having a negative impact on his mother-in-law's health and, for her to have the best chance of recovery, the doctor advised this gentleman to organise family members to bring in food. This woman, as all patients at the Gold Coast Hospital currently are, was being fed sandwiches. Gold Coast Hospital food service workers are engaged in industrial action, perhaps just short of a strike, where they are refusing to serve any food other than wholemeal sandwiches. For a patient's loved ones to be charged with supplying adequate food to someone in care is something straight out of the Third World and not expected on the Gold Coast.

So why are we in this situation? The state Labor government has failed to negotiate with the Queensland Public Sector Union for a reasonable level of pay for their workers. The state Labor government has offered a wage increase that is under the rate of inflation. The Australian Workers Union says the work bans will remain in place until there is a satisfactory outcome for members.

On the Gold Coast, we have a fair expectation of high-quality public health care. The Queensland Labor government has let us down. Having the union movement holding desperately ill patients to ransom is appalling. While at any other time food quality for patients would seem an issue of priority, as it should be, the sad fact is that this issue has not garnered much media attention at all. The reason, it would seem, is the comparable number of horror stories we have already seen in our health system, which continue to mount: the elderly waiting for hours in emergency room corridors, mistakes made due to the overworking of staff and the whole Dr Patel saga. Last week I was emailed by a woman who only two days before her hip replacement surgery was supposed to occur was tossed from the queue without a new appointment.

The Gold Coast Hospital has the third-highest number of people admitted to hospital in Queensland, over 17,000. It services the most people in Queensland of any emergency department, over 26,000, which is 30 per cent more than the number of people at the next highest hospital, Royal Brisbane. The Gold Coast Hospital performed 2,650 elective surgeries, coming third after Royal Brisbane and Princess Alexandra hospitals.

According to Queensland Health's March quarterly service report, right now in Queensland there are just over 36,000 people on waiting lists for elective surgery and 159,000 people waiting to get on the waiting list. Leaked Queensland Health data on Queensland's biggest emergency departments show that, in the last five years, the number of sick people waiting more than eight hours in the Queensland government's emergency queues has doubled, under a Labor government's watch. 'Access block' is the term that describes the delay that patients who need to be admitted to hospital experience in the emergency departments when their in-patient bed is not available. Queensland Health's access block data count the number of seriously ill people who wait eight or more hours.

The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine likens the growing emergency department crisis to the national road toll, with recent studies showing a 20 to 30 per cent mortality rate caused by access block and emergency department overcrowding—about 1½ thousand deaths per year at 2003 levels of access block. This is the report card of the Queensland Labor government.

The Gold Coast emergency department is at crisis point, with 27 per cent of emergency department patients in access block in 2004, growing to 44 per cent in the 2007-08 financial year. Forty-four per cent of the people who walk, crawl or are carried into the emergency department at the Gold Coast Hospital are lying on trolleys or stretchers for over eight hours, when the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine says that you have a 20 to 30 per cent higher chance of dying.

In the last 10 years Queensland Health have reduced the number of hospital beds from 10,809 to 10,304, which is 505 fewer beds. Of those, 1,370, or about 14 per cent, are not actually beds—they are chairs, trolleys, cots, stretchers and lounge suites. That is the report card of the Queensland Labor government. It is absolutely and utterly appalling. Queensland Labor should be ashamed of it. The statistics speak for themselves. It is an absolute disgrace. It should not be allowed to occur and the Queensland state Labor government stands condemned by every single Queenslander that has to rely on such a dreadful, moribund system as that which Queensland Health has left them to fall into. *(Time expired)*