



Gordon Nuttall MP
Member for Sandgate

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BY:.....



**Queensland
Government**

Minister for Health

MI118789

Mr R Messenger MP
Member for Burnett
Shop 7 Bargara Beach Plaza
15-19 See Street
BARGARA QLD 4670

Dear Mr Messenger

Thank you for your letter dated 30 March 2004, regarding health service provision in the Bundaberg region.

I am advised there are waiting times to attend any specialist working in a public hospital in Queensland. These time periods do vary according to location, speciality and most importantly, clinical acuity. All referrals received by a public hospital are reviewed by the relevant specialist medical practitioner in order that they categorise each referral. This system ensures that those people assessed as having the greatest clinical need are seen as soon as possible in the specialist clinic. This process is dependent upon appropriate detail being provided by the referring health care professional. However, the specialist has the option of seeking further information or requesting earlier appointments for patients they feel require more urgent attention.

I am further advised that Bundaberg Health Service District (BHSD) constantly monitors the total number of staff across all disciplines, including administrative staff. Non-clinical staff are essential to the functioning of the Hospital, providing much needed services such as food preparation and delivery, cleaning, portage and security, stores, finance and administrative support to schemes such as Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. Administrative expenses per full time equivalent for BHSD remain in line with the average across all public hospitals in Queensland.

The State Government has allocated an extra \$20 million towards elective surgery to improve the high level of care provided to all people of Queensland. BHSD is contributing to this increased effort in the areas of general surgery, orthopaedics and gynaecology.

I understand there have been a number of specialist medical practitioner resignations from BHSD in the previous five years. However, in the last year this number has reduced significantly with only two resignations, including that of Dr Thiele. The BHSD employs over 740 staff and any organisation of this size some turnover every year can be expected. Staff turnover within the BHSD is relatively low when compared to other Districts throughout the State. Furthermore, there have been a number of specialists appointed in medicine, surgery and anaesthetics, either in a staff specialist or visiting medical officer capacity, in the last year. I acknowledge that the retirement of Dr Thiele from public practice will change the model of care for patients requiring vascular surgery in Bundaberg.

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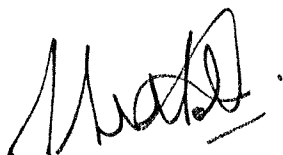
This resignation is an example of the challenges in developing the sustainability of the specialist medical workforce in regional centres. Commonwealth and State governments must continue to work with professional bodies to overcome these challenges.

BHSD is aware that several new specialists have arrived in Bundaberg to begin work in private practice. Presently, the demand for public general surgery services is being met by the two staff general surgeons. I understand that Dr de Lacy participates in the weekend on-call roster for general surgery and works at Breast Screen on a sessional basis. The introduction of a public ENT service using Dr Elphinstone is being considered by Queensland Health in conjunction with senior staff from BHSD. Such resource allocation decisions are not taken lightly with many factors including casemix, finance, equipment procurement, theatre availability, service capability, skill mix plus long term sustainability, taken into account. I am assured that senior medical staff have a number of options available to them to bring any concerns, wishes and thoughts to the notice of BHSD senior management. These senior clinical staff support Mr Peter Leck, District Manager, BHSD, in the provision of high quality, safe health services throughout the District in a financially responsible and effective manner, so as to contribute to the health status of residents in the region.

As Minister for Health, I support the ongoing efforts of all BHSD employees in the provision of a multiple number of health services. I also expect that employees at all levels contribute in a positive manner utilising established processes and procedures, so as to help Queensland Health to continue to move forward.

I trust the issues raised have been resolved. If necessary, I am pleased to make available Mr Cameron Milliner, Policy Advisor, on telephone (07) 3234 1191, to assist in any further enquiries.

Yours sincerely



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29 APR 2004