

## Media Release

Thursday, 30 July 1998

### Health Minister lifts the lid on waiting lists

Queensland Health Minister Wendy Edmond today released the state's elective surgery waiting lists, pledging to use the information to cut waiting times.

Ms Edmond told a launch at Parliament House in Brisbane today that publishing hospital waiting lists would help medical practitioners and patients make informed decisions about where to go for surgery.

"This information has been kept under a veil of secrecy and manipulated for political purposes for the past two-and-a-half years under the Coalition," she said.

"Today I am meeting a major health election pledge to come clean with the people of Queensland.

"Under Labor, this information will be a tool to help cut elective surgery waiting times, not a weapon for waging political battles."

The *Elective Surgery Waiting List Report* contains comprehensive, up-to-date waiting list figures for the 32 hospitals who provide 95 per cent of Queensland's public elective surgery.

The information reflects the state of the waiting list for each hospital at 1 July 1998.

The report details:

- the number of people waiting in each surgical specialty for each hospital.
- the number of people in each urgency category and
- the number of people waiting longer than clinically desirable.

The report will be published quarterly and sent to the state's 10,000 general practitioners and surgeons, as well as being displayed publicly in the 32 hospitals.

Ms Edmond said the lists would allow GPs to refer patients to hospitals where waiting lists were shorter and also allow Queensland Health to compare data and identify trouble spots.

Overall the report shows that around 36,000 people are waiting for surgery as of July 1 --- 70 per cent of them for non-urgent surgery.

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Around 10,000 of the patients have been waiting longer than the ideal.

However, Ms Edmond said her major concern was that the the figures did not represent the whole picture.

“I believe there is an untold story out there about patients who have not been given appointments to see outpatient specialists and therefore can’t get on a waiting list,” she said.

“For instance, there are more than 650 non-urgent patients waiting for an appointment at the Gold Coast Hospital and around 350 in the same boat at Townsville Hospital.

“I have asked Queensland Health for standardised and improved procedures on this issue and on the collection of data.

“I fully expect a flurry of appointments and, as a result, the next quarterly elective surgery report may show some politically unattractive jumps in waiting times.

“I am prepared to wear this in the interests of honesty, openness and a better public health service.”

Ms Edmond said she was also implementing Labor’s waiting list strategy as a matter of urgency.

On top of publication of the elective surgery report, the strategy includes:

- \$6.8 million extra each year for extra surgery for complex procedures;
- transferring patients, where possible, to hospitals with shorter waiting lists;
- working with specialist colleges to expand training places for new specialists;
- maximising the use of operating theatres, including looking at holiday periods and
- increasing day surgery.

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**Eds: For specific information about your local hospital, contact your local health district.**

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