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**Queensland  
Government**  
Queensland Health

**MINISTERIAL  
BRIEFING**

Number BR022297  
For Noting  
**DEADLINE** 14 May 2005

*BRIEFING NOTE to be limited to two pages only. Where additional information is required, supporting schedules / attachments should be used.*

**SUBJECT:**

Orthopaedic Services at Fraser Coast Health Service District

**PURPOSE:**

To brief the Minister on the Orthopaedic Service currently being provided at Fraser Coast Health Service District.

**DEPARTMENTAL OFFICER ATTENDING THE MEETING / EVENT:**

NA

**BACKGROUND:**

- On 4 November 2003 – Chairman of Australian Orthopaedic Association (AOA) writes to Queensland Health expressing concern of Fraser Coast Health Service District (FCHSD) - Orthopaedic Services.
- Early January 2004 – Dr Hanelt, Medical Superintendent, (FCHSD) calls for an investigation into orthopaedic service delivery
- June 2004 – Director-General requests the AOA to nominate investigators to undertake the investigation
- 8 June 2004 – Investigators are appointed, investigators seek indemnity from Queensland Health, report to be completed **30 June 2004**,
- June 2004 – an extension was sought to provide Report until **31 October 2004**
- 1 July 2004 – Investigators arrived in Hervey Bay
- 2 July 2004 – Investigators interviewed staff, facilities were not inspected
- 3 July 2004 – Investigators travelled back to Brisbane and Sydney
- October 2004 – A further extension was sought to December 2004, extension refused
- Ongoing legal discussions in relation to indemnity issues
- 6 May 2005 – Report provided to the Director-General

## KEY ISSUES:

The situation outlined in the Report which may have been valid at the time of investigation, since that time the situation at Fraser Coast has changed and improved significantly.

In January 2005, Fraser Coast recruited an Australian qualified locum orthopaedic specialist to the FCHSD. The orthopaedic specialist was trained in Sydney and is a member of the AOA and a Fellow with the Royal Australian College of Surgeons.

Following a detailed briefing from the Executive of Fraser Coast and a further briefing from the orthopaedic specialist I am confident that the orthopaedic service being provided is a safe and high quality service.

Since January 2005 the Australian trained specialist has significantly changed the clinical governance arrangements in the Orthopaedic Department. These changes include:

- Appropriate supervision of all Orthopaedic RMO's and SMO's
- Specialist has performed and / or closely supervised the majority of orthopaedic surgical cases undertaken in the District
- Personally attended all outpatient clinics
- Personally supervised all Fracture Clinics
- Attended all joint replacement procedures
- Attended all traumas – performing the surgery in approximately 50% of the surgical cases and direct supervision of the other 50% surgical cases.
- Receives notification of any orthopaedic cases presenting at the Emergency Departments at FCHSD
- Undertaken audits weekly of all orthopaedic x-rays
- Provided weekly teaching sessions to the Orthopaedic Team
- Conducted monthly Grand Rounds
- Provided weekly tutorials for the Orthopaedic Team and Emergency

Further, the Medical Superintendent, Dr Hanelt and the Nurse Unit Manager, Operating Theatre, Dale Erwin have both expressed confidence in the recent change in management of the Orthopaedics Department, and the competence and capability of staff to deliver a safe, quality orthopaedic service. More importantly, there has been no adverse event or sentinel event, related to orthopaedic surgery in the Orthopaedics Department since January 2005.

The Report raises serious concerns in regard to a number of issues, including the competence of medical officers who are identified within the Report. These allegations are not as yet tested or validated, and have not been put to the medical officers for response.

However, since the release of the Report, Dr John Scott, Senior Executive Director, Health Service Directorate, has contacted the Director of the Skills Development Centre to arrange for clinical assessment of the medical officers named in the Report. Dr Scott has also contacted the Director of the Orthopaedic Department, Princess Alexandra Hospital to identify an appropriately qualified specialist to provide an independent assessment of the clinical skills and competence of the named medical officers.

Queensland Health's Chief Health Officer, Dr Gerry FitzGerald, has advised that the investigators have "not sought or validated any of the concerns and ordinarily such concerns would require a more formalised investigation at which evidence is collected and responded to".

Dr FitzGerald has also advised that the closing of the Orthopaedic Service at the FCHSD, "would have a significant clinical impact on the patients at Hervey Bay Hospital and therefore it should not be embarked upon until such time as every other alternative strategy to provide quality orthopaedic services has been explored".

In addition, the specialist locum has advised that if his name is used in the media, he will terminate his contract immediately.

### **MEDIA IMPLICATIONS:**

#### ***Key Messages:***

- Since January 2005, there have been significant changes and improvements in orthopaedic services at the Fraser Coast.
- Queensland Health is confident that the orthopaedic services currently delivered are safe and of a high quality with the appropriate clinical governance arrangements in place.
- The Report raises serious concerns in regard to the competence of medical officers, which have as yet not been tested or validated, and have not been put to the medical officers for response.
- Queensland Health had every intention of releasing the report, however our legal advice was that was that it was highly defamatory. It was for this reason that Queensland Health requested that the Report be provided to Mr Morris under summons.
- Because of the defamatory nature of the report, Queensland Health could only expose certain components of the report to the medical officers concerned, and this aspect was being worked through up until Mr Morris served his summons.
- Queensland Health strenuously denies any "cover-up", and emphasises the fact that it was Queensland Health that sought a review, under the auspice of the Australia Orthopaedic Association, of FCHSD orthopaedic services.

### **CONSULTATION:**

Kerry Winsor, Acting District Manager Fraser Coast  
Dr Terry Hanelt, Medical Superintendent Fraser Coast  
Dr Kwon, Orthopaedic Specialist Fraser Coast  
Dale Erwin, Nurse Unit Manager, Operating Theatre, Fraser Coast

### **IS THIS IN ACCORDANCE WITH ANY COMMITMENTS / INITIATIVES:**

N/A

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

N/A

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

N/A

**MEDIA RELEASE**

N/A

**COMMUNICATION STRATEGY / SPEECH:**

N/A

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Cleared by: (Must be Senior Exec Director /  
Manager)  
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Cleared by:

click enter Name  
click enter Title  
click enter Unit  
click enter Contact number

Date: 14 May 2005

Date: click enter date cleared.....

*(Use both sections if this brief requires clearance from District Manager & Zonal Manager,  
otherwise please delete one section)*

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*(Please include Contact Officer details below)*

Prepared by: Deb Miller  
Unit: HSD  
Contact No: 3234 1571

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Minister for Health note the contents of the Briefing Note.

**BRIEFING**

Noted: .....

**COMMENTS:**

**GORDON NUTTALL MP**  
**Minister for Health**  
**Member for Sandgate**

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