



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Corio Electorate: Health Care

SPEECH

Monday, 2 March 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker Marles, Richard, MP	Question No.

Mr MARLES (Corio) (10:53): I rise today to speak about health care, a service which means so much for so many in Australia. From paediatrics to palliative care, a quality health system equipped to meet the complex demands of the future is critical to the quality of life in this country. A quality healthcare system is not something which a region and, indeed, the nation can simply procure but a product of making the right decisions today to secure quality healthcare for tomorrow. In facing this challenge we too often see this Liberal government fail to make those decisions and fail to make the critical investments to ensure the appropriate skills.

In my electorate of Corio, the region's largest health services provider, Barwon Health, are experiencing this precise concern. At present, their Pain Management Unit at University Hospital, Geelong, accommodates one senior trainee under the Specialist Training Program for the Pain Management Unit. The existence of this senior trainee position not only enabled the unit to increase the breadth and intensity of services delivered but also has made an important contribution to addressing the concerning skills shortages for medical specialists. In recent years, the Pain Management Unit has successfully trained 10 specialists. That is 10 specialists that would not be in the health workforce without participating in the Specialist Training Program in the Pain Management Unit. Three of these specialists have continued to work in the Geelong region providing health services to those who suffer from significant pain. Despite this vital success, the Abbott government has refused to provide any certainty that the specialist training program will continue to receive adequate funding beyond October this year. Indeed, currently there are 900 Specialist Training Program funded positions across Australia which are now at risk if funding is cut.

Furthermore, the Abbott government have already demonstrated they cannot be trusted to support proper planning for the future health workforce, demonstrated by their scrapping of Health Workforce Australia—a complementary initiative established under the former Labor government. As modern medicine continually evolves, we are constantly reminded of the importance of persistently building specialist skills across our health sector. The work of the Barwon Health Pain Management Unit exemplifies precisely this. By successfully developing expertise in acute pain, cancer pain, palliative services and chronic pain the unit can most effectively treat the range of illnesses for which a patient may require the services of the hospital. It is through this concentration of this complementary expertise that the unit is able to provide such a high quality of service—a service which reduces the suffering of many and can provide them with a hope of restoring a healthier life.

We need to be supporting our aspiring medical specialists. We need to be able to have genuine confidence that our healthcare system will be equipped to deliver for the challenges of tomorrow. We need to be creating more of these success stories, not less.