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Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment

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Implementing a National Health Registration System

Legislative Assembly 10th March 2010

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — The Statute Law Amendment (National Health Practitioner Regulation) Bill is quite a mouthful, but it is simply about enabling the transition of Victorian health professionals to a national registration and accreditation scheme from 1 July this year. It is a matter we have addressed before, and this bill is mostly about dotting the i's and crossing the t's and sorting out the transitional provisions.

I should flag my intention to speak with unaccustomed brevity, but it seems to be a hallmark of the debate on this bill. As I said, it is basically a tidying up exercise. It is about transitional arrangements, it is about getting the national scheme in place. One of the consequences is that the Chinese medicine professionals and the medical radiation practitioners do not make the transition to the national scheme until 2012, so in part this bill is about ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to deal with that delay.

The time for serious discussion on this issue is well past. The debate we are having today is not about whether we should or should not be part of this scheme; we are well past that point. I do not intend to re-enter that territory except to say that I welcome the changes, which are basically sensible. Of course there are always ways that you can do things better, but this is basically a sensible change which has the potential to improve services to people who are in need of medical care by making the delivery of services more efficient.

It is also true that the underlying intent should be about improving medical services. That should be the yardstick by which we judge any changes, whether we are talking about changes of the professional structure, changes for the professions or changes for health institutions. It is about improving the standard of care; it is about improving patient outcomes. The member from Narracan identified some issues of concern to individuals and to groups, and I simply acknowledge those concerns. Other colleagues have also indicated some concerns, but on balance a single regulatory framework such as proposed by this bill and its predecessor legislation will improve outcomes.

I note there has been perhaps a change of heart or a reassessment of public record matters. I certainly welcome the continued involvement of the Public Record Office in that capacity. It is an organisation for which I have a high regard. I also welcome the change to ensure the continued involvement of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and the extension of its function to the new national boards.

All members would have received correspondence from the Australian Medical Association in support of the bill. I was pleased to see the association's support for the concept of allowing nurses in country hospitals to supply limited medication under certain circumstances. As others have remarked, it is something that has been done in Queensland for quite some time, and I understand also in the Northern Territory, so the practice is well established, but I was pleased to see the association supporting that initiative.

I am tempted to take the opportunity afforded by this debate to talk about the shortcomings of the health services available to Mornington Peninsula residents, the blow-out in ambulance waiting times, the challenges faced by the hardworking staff of Frankston Hospital's emergency department or the record numbers of people waiting for elective surgery in the Premier's Victoria, but I will not test your indulgence by doing that, Acting Speaker, and will simply commend the bill.
