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Tinkering With The Structure Won't Fix Our Health System

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Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — The Health and Human Services Legislation Amendment Bill is symptomatic of the Brumby government's approach to health. It is not about doing anything; it is about being seen to be doing something. It is about being seen to be acting. It is about the appearance of action yet not actually doing anything substantive. Despite the claims made in today's budget, Victoria's health system continues to go backwards.

We have seen the Premier posturing on the national stage. We have heard the claim that Victoria's public health system is the best in the nation. If that is in fact so, it is a damning indictment of the state of public health in Australia.

We had the spectacle of the Premier saying he was going off to Canberra to secure \$4.8 billion over four years and he was not going to give up a cent of the GST. Instead the GST was lost and we got \$890 million over four years. We got 20 per cent of what was claimed to be available; in absolute terms a drop in the bucket.

The standard of care provided by individual members of the professions in the Victorian health system, be they doctors, surgeons, specialists, nursing staff et cetera, is often exceptional. On the other end of the scale, the aggregate care that is provided by the system as a whole is completely and utterly unacceptable.

Instead of discussing what are essentially machinery changes, we could have been much better employed by talking about how we might improve service delivery. We could have been discussing how to reduce elective surgery waiting lists and the number of people left sitting on trolleys, for too many hours, in emergency departments across the state. We could have been discussing how to arrest the continual decline in public health standards in Victoria.

Instead we are discussing machinery provisions, amending the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, the Disability Act 2006, the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and other acts. Essentially, what we are doing is establishing a body corporate known as the Secretary to the Department of Health, abolishing another corporate body known as Secretary to be Department of Human Services, providing for vesting of certain properties, arranging delegation powers and providing powers in relation to intellectual property — these are entirely machinery provisions, which will do nothing to improve the state's health system.

The *Your Hospitals* report was recently published. It was clear from the statistics in that document that the government had failed six out of nine of its own benchmarks; it had completely and utterly failed to meet two-thirds of its own benchmarks.

We believe 137 000 people were left sitting on trolleys for more than 8 hours, an increase of 10 000 compared to the previous year; also 69 000 patients in emergency departments did not receive care in the appropriate time frame. There was a decline in category 2 triage standards of 3 per cent, a decline in triage category 3 — which is the 30-minute category — of 6 per cent, and also a decline in categories 4 and 5.

If anything, surgical outcomes were worse. The government failed to meet the targets for urgent treatment for the first time since the report has been produced; numbers were up from 408 to 942. In semi-urgent cases the figures increased by 11 per cent or 1975; and non-urgent cases increased by 6 per cent or 1135.

Those of us who were politically active before 1999 remember the commentary, often from the then shadow health minister, Mr Thwaites, and from the then opposition leader Steve Bracks, who later became Premier, about how terrible the health system was in 1999.

When you compare the 1999 figures with the new *Your Hospitals* figures, the number of people processed by the system was 72 per cent. It is now down to 66 per cent. In other words, the proportion of people waiting on trolleys has increased substantially. The figures relating to triage categories 2 and 3 are similar.

Thankfully, triage category 1 has remained at 100 per cent, but triage category 2 declined from 83 per cent to 79 per cent, and category 3 from 78 per cent down to 66 per cent.

This exercise has been a total and absolute failure from start to finish.

I am pleased to say the figures for Frankston Hospital, the closest public hospital to the Mornington electorate, are not quite as grim. In fact for triage category 1 all targets were met; for category 2 the government's targets were exceeded, as they were for category 3.

The problem lies in the trolley wait: only 52 per cent of people were processed and in hospital beds within the appropriate time frame — 52 per cent against a target of 80 per cent. It is a similar story with the stay under 4 hours: only 65 per cent against a target of 80 per cent. The elective surgery figures show that for category 1 the target of 100 per cent was met; for category 2, 67 per cent was achieved against a target of 80 per cent; for category 3 it was 88 per cent against a target of 90 per cent. So categories 1 and 3 are pretty good but category 2 is clearly still a challenge.

The figures for waiting lists show that category 1 is up 74 per cent over 12 months, category 2 has gone up by a few per cent but it is reasonably okay, and category 3 is pretty good.

Overall waiting lists are up rather than down; in this case they are up 3 per cent. In this budget there is not one new dollar for Frankston Hospital. Allegedly lots of money — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I remind the member for Mornington to stay on the bill. The appropriation bill will be debated later this week.

Mr MORRIS — This bill is not so much about doing anything as it is about creating an appearance of activity where there is absolutely none occurring. To all intents and purposes it is simply rearranging the deckchairs on the *Titanic*. Indeed it is probably as effective in reducing waiting lists and improving emergency departments as undertaking that particular activity. It will have absolutely no positive impact on the provision of health services in Victoria.
