



Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Member for Stretton



**Queensland
Government**

Minister for Health

30 JAN 2009

MI159370
MOH/08/10096

Mr Neil Laurie
Queensland Parliamentary Service
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 26 November 2008, regarding petition No. 1167-08 regarding the decommissioning of the operating theatre at the Hughenden Hospital and the request that Queensland Health make it a priority to appoint a flying surgeon to service regional and rural areas of North West Queensland.

I appreciate that some residents are concerned about the decommissioning of the theatre. I would like to reassure them that these decisions are made in the best interest of safety and sustainable services to patients.

With the emphasis on specialised services, General Practitioners refer their patients to facilities where these services are available. Patients from Hughenden have been accessing surgical services through Charters Towers and Townsville Hospitals for several years. Providing surgical services requires more than one surgeon. Surgeons require the support of a team of specialised health professionals. Recruiting and retaining health professionals, with the required skills, to rural areas has posed many challenges to health services not only to Queensland but nationwide.

Despite these challenges, the Government has maintained its commitment to Hughenden. Over the last four years the budget for the Hughenden Hospital has increased by 4% together with a staffing increase for the same period of 5%.

Hughenden Hospital has a single operating theatre which has not been utilised for approximately two years, and sterilising standards have changed during that time. The Hughenden Hospital recently underwent an accreditation survey and the theatre did not meet the service capability framework, this impacted significantly on the ability for the facility to be accredited. The decision to decommission the theatre has no impact whatsoever on existing health service delivery in Hughenden.

19th Floor State Health Building
147-163 Charlotte Street Brisbane
GPO Box 48 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3234 1191
Facsimile +61 7 3229 4731
Email health@ministerial.qld.gov.au
Website www.health.qld.gov.au

I am pleased to advise that The Townsville Hospital is providing enhanced surgical outreach services which have provided an avenue for some patients to undergo their procedure at Charters Towers Hospital. If this trial proves effective then the delivery of outreach surgery services in Charters Towers, Ingham and Ayr may be expanded.

Having due regard for providing a safe, quality clinical service to North West communities, the provision of visiting surgical services, such as that proposed in your petition, is subject to a proposed Queensland Health review. In the interim relevant cases are being referred to facilities such as those in Townsville who are best equipped to provide such services for our North West Communities.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Ms Marlene Cochrane, Operations Director, Institute of Rural Health (Charters Towers), will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone number 07 47870355.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Karen Struthers', written in a cursive style.

KAREN STRUTHERS MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health