

MI125462

Mr N Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Service
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 25 November 2004 enclosing a copy of petition number 409-04 lodged by Mr Marc Rowell MP regarding the Ingham Hospital.

In response to the petition, the following background information is provided regarding the medical staffing situation at Ingham Hospital:

- Recruitment and retention of doctors, in particular proceduralists, is an ongoing challenge in small community based facilities.
- Casemix and volumes is a major hurdle in this day and age where there is an expectation that doctors need to maintain a critical mass of procedures to retain skill sets. Often these requirements are college imposed.
- The Director of Medical Services position in Ingham was advertised in September 2002 and a South African applicant was appointed. Unfortunately this doctor only stayed in Ingham for the month of March 2003 before accepting another position elsewhere.
- The position was readvertised and after the recruitment process was completed the position was offered to an Australian based doctor. In August 2003 this offer was not accepted due to personal reasons.
- The recruitment process was recommenced and interest was expressed by a South African doctor. A visit to Ingham took place in August 2003 and the position was offered but declined.
- The recruitment process was again initiated with agencies and candidates for the position were interviewed in October 2003. An appointment was made and the doctor took up the position in February 2004.
- With each of these recruitment processes there are costs associated, over and above the salary, such as accommodation and vehicle etc. There is a recruitment agency fee which is usually between 10-20% of the annual salary, plus relocation costs and familiarisation visits to Ingham, which in a number of cases included international travel. As an example, for one of the recruitment processes the associated costs were \$21,500 to cover the agency fee, relocation and travel expenses.

- One doctor employed at Ingham has resigned on the grounds of ill health and the other has decided to move back interstate.
- Locum medical staff have been arranged to provide appropriate medical coverage in Ingham whilst attempts are made to recruit permanent staff.
- The redevelopment of a new hospital in Ingham has been approved and planning has commenced. This will give Ingham a modern hospital with a community service focus as well as traditional beds.
- Despite Queensland Health's efforts to recruit and retain staff, there is no ability to force staff to stay. There are strict employment protocols to be adhered to when making offers to prospective employees. Sometimes these protocols come into conflict with the applicant's wishes and if this cannot be resolved the applicant declines the position or resigns, after having taken up the position on the assumption that terms could be renegotiated.

It is appreciated that instability in the workforce impacts on health services and staff moral, and every effort is made to recruit and retain staff not only to Ingham but to all areas within the Townsville Health Service District. Recruitment of health professionals outside the metropolitan area can provide additional challenges to Health Services.

The District Manager of the Townsville Health Service District regularly liaises with the Hinchinbrook Shire Council and a Memorandum of Understanding is being developed between both organisations to assist in attracting permanent health professionals to the Ingham area.

There is also regular liaison with the local general practitioners and the Health Service in an endeavour to work together to provide effective health care to the community.

The District Manager of the Health Service also keeps the Local Member informed on issues impacting of health service delivery in the Ingham area.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Mr Michael Fiechtner, Policy Advisor, will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone (07) 323 41191.

Yours sincerely

GORDON NUTTALL MP
Minister for Health
Member for Sandgate