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MO: H/06/03022

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
Cnr Alice and George Sts
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 31 March 2006, relating to petition No: 637-06 on behalf of Aspley constituents regarding the phased opening of emergency services at The Prince Charles Hospital.

My Department has informed me that:

- The Prince Charles hospital currently operates an Emergency Department that treats approximately 12,000 patients annually. The majority of the patients who attend the Department suffer from cardiac and thoracic conditions.
- The redevelopment of The Prince Charles Hospital involves the construction of an expanded Emergency Department, two medical Wards, a new Critical Care Unit and two new theatres, as well as refurbishment upgrades of some areas of the existing Hospital.
- The internal design of the expanded Emergency Department is considered appropriate for the projected needs of the community.
- The community will be progressively informed of the redevelopment.

It should be noted that in late February 2006 senior doctors from The Prince Charles Hospital, in response to the staff shortage situation being experienced in Brisbane in the Emergency Service area, advised that opening The Prince Charles Hospital's emergency department at full capacity immediately could create undue staffing pressures in other emergency departments in the Brisbane area as it could draw doctors away from these hospitals.

The senior doctors also expressed concerns that the development of the necessary infrastructure required to support the emergency department would not be completed until late 2007. Their opinion was that it was vitally important in terms of patient safety to phase the opening of the expanded services in a progressive way to allow service capacity to be developed which was appropriate and responsible.

Under the phased opening the following services will be provided:

- Minor Injuries Clinic run by specially trained nursing and allied health practitioners, who will be supervised by medical staff;
- Direct referral process for patients with acute medical problems;
- Rapid Access Clinic to provide care to patients in a timely manner; and
- Programs to facilitate the training of doctors wanting to work in Emergency Medicine, complimenting their established training programs.

It is anticipated this arrangement will:

- Ease the bed shortage and service access problems across hospitals in the Brisbane North area;
- Support improved linkages with community based services including community based clinics to allow for better management of chronic disease in the Brisbane North area;
- Provide the Hospital with time to complete the building program required to support an expanded emergency department; and
- Support access to community based services.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Mr Barry Jackson, Policy Advisor, will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone (07) 3234 1191.

Yours sincerely

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP