Denis Burke  
Shadow Minister for Transport and Infrastructure  
Defence Support

Are Territorians experiencing unacceptable delays in radiation treatment?

24 March 2004

Member for Brennan Denis Burke has called on the Martin Labor Government to explain to his constituents and Territorians whether the government is meeting national benchmarks in obtaining timely, quality treatment for cancer sufferers who require radiation therapy.

“At the last election Labor promised that they would provide an oncology service for Territorians in Darwin at a cost of $14M. Soon after they scrapped this promise,” Mr Burke said.

“The Federal Government has provided $60m to enable Australians to access better radiation treatment yet the Northern Territory only gained $75,000.00, to conduct a study to determine better access for those in remote areas. Territorians have heard nothing of the results of this study.

“A recent study reported nationally that was conducted by The Faculty of Radiation Oncology, The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiation Oncologists reveals some alarming trends.

Quoting from the report Mr Burke said:” Despite the concern that the professions, consumers and policy makers share over the provision of radiation oncology services, more than 15000 Australians who would have benefited from radiation treatment in Australia alone were not able to access this treatment in 2002. For those who were able to access radiotherapy treatment, worsening delays were experienced in Australia, with more than 40% of patients receiving curative treatment, 30% receiving palliative treatment, and 56% receiving emergency treatment starting outside of standard good practice times. Delays of up to 151 days were experienced in Australia ” unquote.

“Around 250 Territorians travel south for this treatment. This number is expected to double in the next few years. The treatment itself is lengthy and traumatic and disruptive for the individuals and loved ones involved,” Mr Burke said.

“Some are my constituents and all have a right to know whether their Territory health system is responding adequately to their needs.

“Labor made much of this issue prior to the election and apart from walking away from their promise has been silent since.

“Territorians deserve some answers.

“How many Territorians were not able to access radiation oncology treatment and why?
“How many were treated – Within standards of good practice? Within the maximum acceptable waiting time? Or after an unacceptable waiting time?”

Ends