



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Palliative Care

SPEECH

Monday, 2 June 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Rishworth, Amanda, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (11:58): I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that National Palliative Care Week is being held between 25 May and 31 May, with this year's theme being Palliative care everyone's business: let's work together;
- (2) recognises that with an ageing population in Australia the demand on palliative care services will increase, while also noting that palliative care is required by people of all ages;
- (3) acknowledges:
 - (a) that providing high quality palliative care in a range of settings including in the home is critical to ensuring that patients and their carers have their wishes respected; and
 - (b) the important role of the health workforce, trained volunteers and all those who are involved in delivering quality palliative care; and
- (4) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) increase community awareness and understanding about palliative care and the importance of advance care planning; and
 - (b) ensure adequate funding for palliative care services through both commonwealth and state and territory agreements, as well as through the National Palliative Care Program.

This motion is very important and I am pleased to have this opportunity today to talk about palliative care and its critical importance to Australia. The first point of the motion notes that last week was National Palliative Care Week. I joined with a lot of colleagues, including the member for Forrest, in a wonderful event held in the Great Hall of Parliament House. We had some really wonderful speakers shining a light on the importance of palliative care. The theme for the week was that palliative care should be everyone's business. That is an important element and it is the reason I rise to speak about this today.

The second point of the motion recognises that more Australians are going to need access to high-quality palliative care services because our nation is growing older and living longer. We want to be able to die with dignity and to choose where we spend the final weeks of our lives. There are many people who want to die in their own home and this motion acknowledges their desire. Worryingly, research by Palliative Care Australia found that only one in 20 Australians has an advanced care plan that outlines their end-of-life wishes. As I outlined in the five points of this motion, the government needs to do more to raise awareness about the importance of advanced care planning. National Palliative Care Week was also a good opportunity to celebrate the fantastic work of those who provide palliative care—the GPs, nurses, allied health professionals and trained volunteers. They are all doing a tremendous job and we should recognise this fact.

As our population ages, the demand for palliative care will increase and the pressure on these front-line services to deliver good, high-quality palliative care will be immense. We need to make sure that we are listening to those around the world who are putting this at the forefront. On 21 May the World Health Assembly adopted its first ever palliative care resolution on the integration of hospice and palliative care into national health services. This requires that we ensure that palliative care is included in national health policies. It is vitally important that palliative care is not seen as just an add-on but as an integral part of our healthcare system. The resolution also calls for palliative care to be part of the curricula for all health professionals. Health professionals play a key part in delivering dignified end-of-life care and that was one thing that came through very clearly at the breakfast:

when a health professional has a deep understanding of what high-quality palliative care is about the families, and indeed the individual needing palliative care, had a much better experience. Ensuring that it is known not just to a select group of health professionals who understand this area—that it is wide-ranging—is really important.

We need to prepare the whole health workforce for delivering palliative care to ensure that Australians are given a high-quality end-of-life service. Palliative care is often focused on older Australians and, while that is where the great demand is, I do not think we can forget that palliative care is also needed by young people. We heard, at the breakfast, a brave mother who stood up and talked about her young boy who had needed palliative care for 17 years. That is really important, and it is also recognised in the motion. We need our government to invest to ensure that each and every health professional receives palliative care training.

The resolution also highlights the issue of access to essential medicines, particularly strong pain medications. Earlier this year the Worldwide Palliative Care Alliance, with the World Health Organisation, published the *First Global Atlas of Palliative Care at the End of Life*. The report found that 80 per cent of countries globally have low, or very restricted, access to strong pain medications—which means millions of people are dying in pain or distress. This issue is particularly prevalent in rural and regional Australia where a lot of care is delivered by doctors who may not have the necessary experience. We need to support our doctors in rural and regional areas, as well as our nurses and other health professionals. This motion is a really important contribution. I commend the motion to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Goodenough): Is the motion seconded?