

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 30 June 2010, Page 542

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (16:52): First of all, I would like to thank all members for their contribution on this motion. At the end of the day, I guess it comes down to your interpretation of whether we have a needs-based or diagnosis-based provision of services. I certainly do not see any evidence in this issue of disabilities that we are anywhere near requiring a needs-based assessment of people with a disability of any kind, let alone PDD-NOS.

I would also like to thank Mrs Andrew for coming forward and making her private situation known. This was not at all easy for her to do; she is a very private person. I believe she is a fierce lobbyist behind the scenes for PDD-NOS sufferers but, publicly, she is a very private person. It has taken a great deal of courage for her to allow us to discuss her personal issues in this chamber, in quite a specific way, I might add. I would like to read a paragraph of a letter from the Hon. Jennifer Rankine in relation to Mrs Sheralee Andrew and her situation. The letter states:

I understand that Autism SA has advised the Andrew family that they can access a number of general Autism SA services. These include the telephone information line, specialist workshops, resource centre and relevant consumer-led support groups. Autism SA has further advised the Andrew family that they can offer a full range of relevant Autism SA services on a fee-paying basis.

The fact of the matter is that the circumstances of most people who are dealing with children with a disability—especially autism and Asperger's, which are very difficult behaviours to deal with—are such that these families scratch for every dime. I find it condescending and patronising of the minister to say that services are available on a fee-for-service basis when there is no hope that these people would be able to pay the fee to actually access those particular services. I remind the government of what I have said in many other speeches: if we cannot look after our sick and vulnerable and meet their needs, then I question what purpose we serve.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Hear, hear!

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Thank you. It is true. I think we can deal with all the big issues, and I think we do that quite well in this place. However, when we get down to the nitty-gritty of individuals and their suffering and distress, their trying to cope with daily life and trying to keep their family together, for those people who live on meagre resources, a sentence like, 'They can access services on a fee-paying basis' is offensive, to say the least.

The Hon. Ian Hunter said that the Hon. Stephen Wade was garbling some of the figures. I would like to make the point that the Hon. Stephen Wade was talking about school-age children when talking about the number of people with children suffering with autism spectrum disorder. I believe that the Hon. Ian Hunter's figures included that of preschool-age children as well. So, that would give a bit of an explanation as to the disparity in the figures.

I am not quite sure about the amendment that the Hon. Ian Hunter has put forward because, as usual, there has been no consultation and no discussion about how, what, where, when and

why we have the need for this, other than a two-sentence explanation at the end of his speech. So, on that basis alone, I would be inclined not to support this amendment.

This motion was put forward to encapsulate pervasive developmental disorder—not otherwise specified, and to point out the issues that sufferers of this disorder—and their families—have to deal with. Given that I have had no consultation about this amendment—and I do not believe anybody else has—if it is not important enough to consult on, then it is certainly not important enough to include.

Amendment negatived; motion carried.