

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO THE PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT ALBANY
MONDAY, 25 AUGUST 2014**

SESSION TWO

Members

Hon Liz Behjat (Chairman)
Hon Darren West (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Nigel Hallett
Hon Jacqui Boydell
Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson

Hearing commenced at 11.10 am**Miss ROXANNE METCALF****Disability Pensioner, sworn and examined:****Mrs STEPHANIE METCALF, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, while we get ready for the next witnesses, as some of you arrived during the middle of that last hearing, I just want to reiterate that the process today is for our committee to be finding out evidence from people who have agreed to be witnesses to us today; it is not an opportunity for a question-and-answer session. I would also like to take the opportunity to welcome Mr Peter Watson to our gallery, the local member. It is lovely to see you here and you are very welcome. Thank you for taking the time to come to us today. Roxanne and Stephanie, is it not?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Hi. How are you? Were you in the room when I introduced the members of the committee before?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: No? Okay; we will go through that again for you—not a problem. My name is Liz Behjat. I am the chairman of this committee. I represent the North Metropolitan Region. Starting from the left here, we have Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, who represents the East Metropolitan Region; the deputy chair of the committee, Hon Darren West, from the Agricultural Region; our advisory officer, Felicity Mackie; Hon Nigel Hallett, who represents the South West Region; and Hon Jacqui Boydell, who represents the Mining and Pastoral Region. So, you have a great cross-section of the entire of Western Australia. I think South Metropolitan Region is the only region that is not represented on our committee. There are some formalities I need to go through here, and then it is going to be very relaxed, so I do not want you to feel intimidated in any way by this process. Please use our first names and things like that so that it is a pretty friendly process. First of all, I need to ask you to take an oath or an affirmation before you give us your evidence.

[Witnesses took the oath.]

The CHAIRMAN: We have your contact address on the witness forms, so we will not ask you to give your contact addresses in public, as I do not think that is fair. Stephanie, you are just appearing as a private citizen today to give evidence; is that right?

Mrs S. Metcalf: I am Roxanne's advocate.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have your address on record, Roxanne, and you are a user of the PATS system?

Miss R. Metcalf: Yes, and my mother comes as my carer.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay; great. I am just going to run through the more formal bit here. You have both signed a document entitled "Information for Witnesses". Did you both understand that document that you signed?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: To let you know, these proceedings are being recorded by Hansard today, and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, can you

quote the full title of any document that you have—I probably do not expect that you would have official documents today—that you refer to during the course of the hearing. Just be aware of the microphone in front of you there and do not put anything in front of it. I remind you that your transcript is going to become a matter for the public record. If, for some reason when you are giving evidence today, you want to say something confidentially to the committee that you are not comfortable saying or that you do not want other people in the room to hear, you can ask for us to go into private session. The committee would then consider your request; and, if that request is granted, we would then clear the room and ask people to leave, and you could then speak to us confidentially. So, at any time if you want to do that, please feel free to ask us that. Until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege. Do not let that put you off in any way. It is really just the standard words that we go through. We do not want you to feel comfortable throughout this process today. First of all, we would like to just start with perhaps you giving us an opening statement, telling us about your experience with the PATS system.

Miss R. Metcalf: A lot of the time we find the PATS system insufficient. I have got multiple health conditions, which mum is well aware of more than I can recite them. But quite often I need air travel to Perth, and the response we get from the PATS staff is, “Why do you need air travel?” I have got letters from my doctors, things and specialists that are down here saying I need air travel, and they still debate the need for it, even though I have got a really good reason.

The CHAIRMAN: And your doctor is providing that reason to PATS?

Miss R. Metcalf: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: So, it is not just that they tick the box and then they do not give that extra —

Miss R. Metcalf: No.

The CHAIRMAN: So, someone other than a doctor makes that decision. A clerical person then makes that decision: “It doesn’t matter what the doctor said; you’re not going to travel by air because we have decided.”

Mrs S. Metcalf: It is questioned.

Miss R. Metcalf: It is always questioned.

Mrs S. Metcalf: And it is questioned quite openly at the front counter; it does not matter who is standing behind you.

The CHAIRMAN: So, you are not taken into a private room for those sorts of discussions.

Miss R. Metcalf: No, and sometimes it is quite intimidating, especially when you are, like, revealing your health information in front of the reception at the hospital, and their attitude is quite intimidating to me. So, quite often I have to get my mother to go up and sort things out, because one of my illnesses is a mental illness and I cannot deal with the stress that they put me under. So, I get my mother to deal with them instead.

Hon DARREN WEST: So, as a consequence, once you have sort of been through that process and you have been questioned, have you ever had occasion where you have been refused the air travel?

Miss R. Metcalf: No.

Hon DARREN WEST: It is just a matter of going through the process.

Mrs S. Metcalf: It is going through the process, and it is a continual going through the process. Roxanne travels up to Perth sometimes three times a year. We do try to condense her appointments, to the point where I have spent several weeks on the phone ringing King Edward Memorial, Sir Charles Gairdner, outside specialists; and sometimes I have got three or four appointments at

Sir Charles Gairdner for Roxanne, and then you have to go through each different room, you know, and consulting —

The CHAIRMAN: To try to coordinate them.

Mrs S. Metcalf: Trying to get them all to coordinate, and it can be quite difficult, as you would imagine. And to then have to be critiqued and questioned at PATS as to, “Why do you need to have this travel?” and, “Why can’t you condense your appointments anymore?” You know, you do all that you possibly can to save money for the government and to make things easier for yourself. It just gets quite stressful.

The CHAIRMAN: And you said that Roxanne needs to access services like that about three times a year.

Mrs S. Metcalf: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Over how many years has she had to be part of this system?

Mrs S. Metcalf: The last four or five years.

Miss R. Metcalf: For the air travel specifically.

Mrs S. Metcalf: For air travel.

The CHAIRMAN: And there is always a positive outcome in that the air travel is approved, but you just have to jump through all the hoops to get there.

Mrs S. Metcalf: So many hoops, and it is the lack of compassion, I suppose, that you get at the counter at PATS at times. It is not all the time, but there are times when there is a definite lack of compassion.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there consistency in the person that you are dealing with? For instance, in the PATS system, is there someone who is assigned to you to look after yours? Is it just whoever happens to be at the counter at the time deals with Stephanie and Roxanne?

Miss R. Metcalf: Yes, whoever is there, yes.

Mrs S. Metcalf: There was a period about four years ago when we did have one person there who always took Roxanne’s case because she knew it quite in depth, and there were no issues, but since there have been changes in the regional hospital since it has become the new hospital, there has been a difference.

Hon DARREN WEST: That was my next question: have you noticed a trend in things getting worse, staying the same or getting better?

Miss R. Metcalf: No; worse.

Mrs S. Metcalf: It has gotten worse as far as that respect.

The CHAIRMAN: If there was a system where you could go online to organise the PATS thing, do you have access to a computer system at home?

Mrs S. Metcalf: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: So, you go to a GP, for instance, and this is where you get the ball rolling, and then the GP could start that process that they need to do, and then you would be in the system. And then if there are questions to be asked such as that, that would be something that could be done via an email service with you, rather than having to go into the hospital to do that. Would you see benefit to a system like that.

Mrs S. Metcalf: Yes, absolutely!

Miss R. Metcalf: Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN: Do members have more questions?

Hon DARREN WEST: I have just one more, briefly, I suppose. Given that the scheme is ultimately useful to you, are there any other suggestions that you might make to us, because we are doing an inquiry into the scheme and we are going to make some recommendations perhaps into how it might be made stronger in the future? What other recommendations would you have for us?

Miss R. Metcalf: We always stay with family up in Perth as a general rule, unless we use the Leukaemia Foundation, who give us some hotel accommodation at times. Twenty dollars a night is not sufficient, not when the only family we have got is in Byford. So they have to travel all the way in, all the way back, and there is no assistance for getting to the actual appointment once you have got to Perth. When you are travelling from Byford, it is quite a long way and \$20 a night just does not cover what is needed.

Hon DARREN WEST: What you need.

Miss R. Metcalf: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: That is a very interesting point that you raise; \$20 even for staying with family is not very much, even to contribute to the household costs that they would have to take you on, let alone any public transport cost to get you to your appointments or taxi fares or anything like that. So your airfare is paid for; they get you to Perth. What about getting from the airport to Byford?

Mrs S. Metcalf: I may be corrected here, but I was told that you could get a taxi from the airport to the CBD—so, the centre of Perth—and then you are on your own. I said to them, “A taxi from the airport to the CBD isn’t really going to help me, because, yes, I can get from Perth to Armadale on a train with a sick person, but then I can’t get from Armadale to Byford.” And I should not have to get from Perth to Armadale on a train with a sick person anyway.

The CHAIRMAN: What has that response been from the departmental people when you have spoken to them?

Mrs S. Metcalf: There is nothing we can do about that.

Miss R. Metcalf: There is nothing we can do about that. They are the rules; you have to find your own way.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: Have you ever needed to access the exceptional circumstances?

Miss R. Metcalf: We have come close to it when I had radiotherapy. We had a little bit of trouble there because there were hoops, again, to jump through. They did not give me any assistance until way after the radiotherapy had finished. I was staying in Byford for most of the time and we ended up finding the Leukaemia Foundation to help us, because there was no other way we could deal with the transport costs to and from hospital every day. PATS just kept on putting walls up; they just: “Sorry; we can’t help you.”

Mrs S. Metcalf: We eventually got into Milroy house in Shenton Park. I think there were maybe three or four weeks when we had to rely on the Leukaemia Foundation to drive all the way from Osborne Park to pick up Roxanne at Byford to take her back to Sir Charles Gairdner for a half-hour treatment —

The CHAIRMAN: I was going to say that it is a very short treatment as well, is it not?

Mrs S. Metcalf: — to travel all the way back to Byford to deliver her back to Byford and then to travel back to Osborne Park. We had to make sure that all of these appointments were in sync, because the cars were not released from Osborne Park until nine o’clock in the morning. They had to be back by 2.30 in the afternoon. You have got to fit your radiotherapy into that and —

Miss R. Metcalf: And your doctors’ appointments.

Mrs S. Metcalf: — any other corresponding appointments that you had to deal with the sickness that was involved from the treatment. It was not until quite some way into the treatment—I was

down here; I had to come down here to be at work, so I had to leave Roxanne with my 84-year-old mother—that we did get her into Milroy house.

Miss R. Metcalf: Because I got that sick.

Mrs S. Metcalf: There is not always accommodation. They can state, “We have got Crawford house and we have got Milroy house.” They are full.

Miss R. Metcalf: They are full; they are always full.

Mrs S. Metcalf: You have got to wait.

The CHAIRMAN: So without going into the details of the sorts of treatments that you require, do you think you are going to find with this new Albany Health Campus and the allied health services that are now available there that more and more of your treatments will be available in Albany for you and you will not need to travel to Perth?

Miss R. Metcalf: Not at this stage, because there are no haematologists that come down here; there are no corneal surgeons that come down here. A lot of my specialists just do not travel down here at all; they only stay within the major hospitals in Perth.

Mrs S. Metcalf: And there is no-one that deals with fibromyalgia; there is no-one that deals with chronic fatigue.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I just wanted to firstly state that, having to deal with your medical issues, Roxanne and your mum, and continually having to deal with a process that seemingly is not always helping you, I commend you on your bravery to continue to do that because that is not easy. So I hear that and I really thank you for sharing that story. I just have a couple of things that I want to ask your feedback on. From what I am hearing from you, first, when you go in to lodge your PATS claim—you are not unfamiliar to the process and the people there, I am sure, know you and probably have an understanding of your health issues—do they proactively put you in contact with, say, foundations like the Leukaemia Foundation or the Cancer foundation, who can supply you with alternative types of accommodation or travel or help you in any way?

Miss R. Metcalf: No; we have had to find that ourselves.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: My second question would be: it seems there is a lack of compassion and of the system helping you when the priority should be your health, and actually the priority is on the process; is that a fair comment?

Miss R. Metcalf: Yes, the process and the fact that they think that it is easy for someone with multiple medical conditions to travel by car. It is not. Four hundred kilometres is a long way when you are in chronic pain and things like that; I just cannot do it. I just cannot do it. I would do it if I could, but, honestly, I cannot do it and then go and attend my appointments, because by the time I get up to Perth, I am a wreck.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I just wanted to say to you both thank you very, very much for coming today. I hope it was not too stressful a process for you to go through, because it is only by us hearing from people like you that you help to assist us in our deliberations and the recommendations that we might be able to make to hopefully at some stage get differences made to the scheme. So your evidence today has been extremely valuable and you have been incredibly brave coming and giving us the evidence. On behalf of everybody on the committee, thank you so much for doing that.

Miss R. Metcalf: Thank you.

Mrs S. Metcalf: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 11.28 am
