

Hospital delays 'put lives at risk'

By GEMMA BERRY

TOWNSVILLE Hospital has been slammed for risking lives following a sharp increase in the amount of time patients have been forced to wait for a bed after arriving in an ambulance.

Ambulance "ramping" in the Northern region has increased by 59 per cent, according to State Government figures released this week.

A total of 1825 patients were forced to wait outside for more than the benchmark 15 minutes before being admitted to hospital in the 2009/10 financial year, compared to 1148 in 2008/09 — an increase of 677.

The number of patients waiting more than an hour increased from 32 to 34, but there was a drop in the number of patients waiting more than two hours, from 13 to five.

Opposition emergency services spokesman Ted Malone claimed the 59 per cent increase was putting lives at risk and costing taxpayers a fortune.

"The figures speak for themselves ... ambulance ramping is out of control," he said.

"It's a costly disaster any way you look at it. It's a monumental failure by the long-term Bligh Government to adequately resource and manage our overloaded emergency departments and the flow-on is seriously risking lives and wasting ambulance resources."

Australian Medical Association Queensland president Dr Gino Pecoraro said although the number of people waiting had increased, the waiting time had decreased.

"Ramping of ambulances and a lack of beds are major concerns for

our members," he said. "For someone who has required ambulance transportation it means treatment is paramount and should be timely.

"If they are spending time parked in a queue when they should be receiving treatment then I don't think people would argue that lives are being put at risk."

Dr Pecoraro said feedback from members suggested there was a chronic bed shortage at the hospital for emergency patients.

"So while they are improving and increasing the size of their Accident and Emergency Department, it isn't going to fix this problem," he said.

Townsville Hospital director of Emergency Dr Niall Small denied staff left patients outside in ambulances.

"According to the most recent data, 98 per cent of patients at Townsville

Hospital were transferred off Queensland Ambulance Service stretchers into an emergency department patient care area within the benchmarked times," he said.

"We are very proud of our track record with off-stretcher times and it is an important facet of the care we deliver in our emergency department.

"Our emergency department remains one of the busiest in the state and our staff do an outstanding job."

Statewide, in 2008/09 there were 100,795 instances of ambulances ramped for more than 15 minutes. This figure soared 20 per cent to 120,322 in 2009/10.

The number of patients waiting more than an hour jumped 26 per cent and the number waiting more than two hours rose 29.5 per cent.



Keith Urban and Nicole Kidman

Paisley gong at country music awards

US singer-songwriter Brad Paisley has scooped the top award at country music's night of nights after five years of waiting, while Keith Urban went home empty handed.

But despite missing out on a gong, the New Zealand-born singer and his wife Nicole Kidman glowed at the 44th Country Music Association Awards in Nashville, Tennessee, while talking about the accent of their two-year-old daughter Sunday Rose, which is a blend of Australian and southern American.

"She says 'Y'all' and 'g'day, mate'. She's a mix," Kidman said on the red carpet.

Caboilture-raised Urban was nominated for two of the major CMA awards — entertainer of the year and male vocalist of the year, which was won by Blake Shelton.

Shelton's fiancée Miranda Lambert went home with a bag of awards on her 27th birthday, including female vocalist, album of the year for *Revolution* and music video of the year for *The House That Built Me* — her personal tale about growing up in hard times, written by Tom Douglas and Allan Shamblin.

Lady Antebellum claimed single of the year for their breakthrough *Need You Now* and vocal group of the year.

Usually Kidman is the only Oscar winner at the big country music awards nights, but fellow Academy Award best actress winner Gwyneth Paltrow stepped into the spotlight to perform a song from her upcoming movie, *Country Strong*.

Strumming a guitar, Paltrow was greeted with plenty of applause by the crowd.

"I went to a great bar and had a pint of Guinness," Paltrow, revealing her cure for pre-performance nerves, said.

One of country music's top draws, Paisley was emotional as he walked away with the coveted entertainer of the year award after missing out every year since 2005.



Miranda Lambert



TESTING TIMES . . . Cam Leitch, Will Emms, Alan Taylor, Paul Lewis and testing station technical officer Paul Lewis

Storm front researchers garaged in new HQ

IT'S the safest way to test the strength of steel without having to wait for a cyclonic storm to buffet the city.

James Cook University's Cyclone Testing Station has been operating since the 1970s but had a new home as of yesterday, thanks to Garage World.

The new facility will allow researchers to test wind tunnels, the impact of severe winds on building structures, wind loading and the level of damage caused by flying debris during cyclone events.

Cyclone Testing Station manager Cam Leitch said the new building research facility would help the facility to keep pushing for improved safety standards and better cyclone-resistant outcomes.

"The new facility means we can set up our air cannon, which fires out a missile at different speeds to recreate wind-borne debris," he said.

"We also do a fair bit of commercial testing

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and research into wind effects, components for low-rise buildings as well as community education.

"We also have experts from insurance companies and the building code's board of people who help us set directions for our research and assess how projects are going along the way."

Garage World business manager Will Emms said it was fantastic for the company to be involved in the Cyclone Testing Station.

He said the new building was officially unveiled yesterday.

"The station plays a really critical part in life up in North Queensland where cyclones are a regular event, so it's great to be involved," he said.

Mr Leitch said the testing station performed a crucial role for industry, government regulations and for the community.

— BROOKE BASKIN