Dear Sirs and Madams,

I was employed with Queensland Health in its corporate body for the period of one year in 2012. I submit this recount of my experiences of the restructure that took place during that year in the hope that the worst parts of it will never happen again.

It is difficult to find a place to begin. Looking back I can see the restructure of Queensland Health began well before I commenced my role. Hindsight, as they say, is 20:20. Yet at the time, it felt as though the restructure was thrust upon us as we carried on our work quite unawares of the gravity of the decisions already made and yet to be implemented. The entire process was a bitter reminder of our relative lack of value as people in the face of a saving political face. It occurs to me then to not start my story at the beginning, but at its end.

On the morning of Friday, September 7th, 2012 the Queensland Health workforce was informed of their fates. Thousands of jobs would be lost. Most of these temporary/casual, but a large number of permanent roles were also included. I recall I did not bother to go to the meeting at the building it was held. I stayed in my office to listen over the speaker phone. Why did I do this? Because for the past few months every single meeting held regarding the future of Queensland Health had been a complete and utter waste of time.

I cannot remember how many meetings promising information were held in that cramped little room on level 3 of the Charlotte Street building. Not that the room itself was small, rather it was simply unable to hold the hundreds of people that turned up. I recall the room filling to its brim and the chairs that had been set out being packed away because there was not enough room for us to sit. I recall our Deputy Director General (DDG) calling a meeting in that very room with promises of answers – only to introduce themselves as the new DDG of our units over the space of an hour; again with no answers (several units were relocated to other DDGs during the restructure). I remember many more people speaking on the tiny microphone up front with every new and wasteful meeting – usually after several minutes of sorting out any technical difficulties not dealt with prior to said meeting – and all giving us the same responses, but no real answers.

Not that we didn't try to get answers. We asked, and received only vague responses to the tune of, "We're working on it", "We're looking into the roles and responsibilities of each unit", "Everyone is important and its important you're part of the process", and my particular favourite, "When we know, you'll know".

Pardon my sarcasm, but: Yeah. Right.

What is galling to me is that they knew. They knew and they didn't say anything. Do you think that we, the employees, didn't know that they knew, but had been directed not to say anything? They knew weeks, likely months, in advance of the kinds of numbers that were going to be made redundant. Yet they danced around the issues and many, many people who would have otherwise taken a separation package or a voluntary redundancy suddenly found themselves out of a job with only 12 weeks pay for their years of service. I should know. My team was reduced from some 30 jobs, to only one.

You see, I do not fault the government for restructuring Queensland Health. It was something that had to happen. The government was overstaffed. Most of whom I spoke to knew that. No, what I fault the government for is for withholding the information from us. I fault them for not allowing us to prepare for our imminent departure. I fault them for the complete lack of respect shown to us. I fault them for taking away our dignity as people in an effort to save political face. I fault them for treating us like a debt to be slashed and finally but most importantly for taking away our choices. It was demoralizing. It created an atmosphere of confusion, despair, anger and bitterness. Had we known – had we only been told: "Your job is likely to go. Look for other options", we would have. We could have made plans. We could have made better choices.

But we couldn't. We didn't know. We weren't told *anything* of substance until the morning of September 7th, 2012. Prior to that, we had been told to "consider" our options, that they would "welcome" voluntary redundancies, that if your job was to be made redundant they would put you through an ERP process to find you a new place in the organisation if you truly wished to stay. Lies and more lies. People stayed because they thought they had the choice to stay. There was no hint or clue that the truth of the matter was they had no choices, and as time went by, their options became even more limited, and worsened by the day. In the end, everyone who lost their job had been forced to redundancy. Lost were the choices of yesterday, like the voluntary separation packages (VSP), voluntary redundancies and ERP process. Yet even these 'solutions' of the time failed the employees and the organisation.

Several months before September 7th, voluntary separation packages (VSPs) were available. Those who took them were mostly the lifeblood of the organisation. They'd been in the organisation for a decade, earned six figures, had an amazing amount of knowledge and connections, and were being offered huge amounts of money just to quit. While this may have helped slash the staff budget, the program essentially failed because Queensland Health lost a good portion of its human capital. It was a stupid program that meant the units that lost people, lost the funding for the role as well. It meant that the work once done by that role had to be divvied up to others. How many teams lost half their staff and were left with the same workload but only half the people? Not to mention how the significant cost of the VSPs impacted the Queensland Health budget. Not that I begrudge those who took a VSP for cashing out, I'd have done the same had I the opportunity. I'm simply tired of governments throwing money at problems instead of using smart policies to attain objectives.

Then came voluntary redundancies and ERPs around July 2012. I recall the package offered wasn't too bad, but much less than the VSPs. My memory of this is slightly fuzzy because the program did not apply to me. I was contracted to Queensland Health and this wasn't an option for a temporary staff member. I only remember that most people who hadn't taken a VSP had chosen to stay on, and still wanted to stay on. They liked their jobs and didn't want to quit. It was about this time that certain roles began to be made redundant and the ERP process really kicked in. Then it was revealed to be another failure.

The ERP process was to relocate permanent employees to other roles if their role had been made redundant. To prevent people 'rorting' the system, they were required to accept a role from the two or three options given them (which would "of course" be skill matched to them), or find themselves made redundant if they refused all options. How ironic then that we found the system was rorting

the people instead. There was one lady on my floor who was in administration, yet had been given the choice of clinical roles (as in supporting the medical staff do their jobs) for which she was completely *unqualified*. She informed the ERP operators of her lack of suitability, to which they asked if she was "rejecting the options" given her. Of course she said, no – she wasn't rejecting the options. But how could she accept a clinical role when she wasn't qualified for it? Yet still, they pushed her to 'admit' she was rejecting the options. As far as I am aware, she ended up accepting a clinical support officer role in a hospital, fearful of losing her permanency. I don't know what happened after that, though I was told she was still fighting them over the issue when I left at the end of my contract. What ridiculousness.

My point in recalling these instances is to demonstrate how it was simply failure after failure after failure. The government failed to inform its staff of the coming changes. It failed to implement effective solutions. It failed to provide them with choices. It failed to treat them as people. It acted as it did in order to play its cards close to its chest and preserve political face. After all, if people don't have time to consider the changes, review their options and lack the chance to respond… well much gets lost in the confusion. We just end up shuffled out the door with no idea how we ended up in such a situation, which brings me back to September 7th.

Our DDG spoke of the several thousand roles that would be made redundant. I could hear and feel the hush in that conference room as we sat around the speakerphone. The DDG said that we were being told now, and that the Minister for Health would be addressing Queensland later on that day. I was furious. I could only wonder at the unmitigated cheek of these people who held the jobs of my friends in their hands to finally tell us the very day the rest of the world would find out. We were the proverbial chopped liver. After some further platitudes, the floor was opened to questions. I asked over the speakphone if there were specific numbers for the departments, to which I was answered no, and that we would find out from our Deputy Directors later that day.

Finding out like that was devastating. We had no clue who would lose their jobs and who would keep them. For weeks, our unit had been meeting with our Deputy Director on our roles and responsibilities. I thought we'd keep half the jobs in our unit, at least. Our work was fairly important. We provided an important service to the districts. We recruited for them, helped them attract workers, and supported them in promoting their region as a place of employment. Our unit meant that several million dollars was saved every year ensuring that we found clinical staff for jobs in regional and rural areas. We did support the metropolitan areas when needed, but it was the regional and rural areas that truly needed the assistance. They were so small, their budgets so limited, and they lacked the staff with the skills necessary to make a proper go of getting workers to these regions. Places like Mount Isa are not easy areas to attract workers. But in this I was wrong.

Just after lunch we were called into our Deputy Director's office to find out the fate of our unit. There, we were informed by our manager (whom had requested that they be the one to deliver the news and not the Deputy), that only one role of our unit would remain permanent. Several more would end the next month, then the rest in December, save one other role that would continue for a further year to assist in a particular project.

My colleagues were stunned. I was stunned and very soon after that furious. One role was left, and we'd had not the faintest idea. Several of my team began to cry. One was expecting a baby. I handed out tissues. The Deputy said some more platitudes and asked feedback. Questions were asked about

our options. Yes, the temporary roles would cease with their contract. Yes, the permanent roles would end December 31st. Yes, 12 weeks redundancy pay would be made. Yes, you could choose to go through the ERP process, but you might end up somewhere else in the Queensland Government, not just in Queensland Health now, and the fact was roles were scarce. Yes, you could decide to quit now. No, if you quit now you would not get the redundancy package. Were there any questions or final comments? I waited until everyone had finished and then spoke my piece:

This does not affect me. I am on a temporary contract that will end. I have known for months now that my role will finish. But my colleagues here, my friends, haven't had that luxury. They have been told time and again that there would be information given, only to have their time wasted in pointless meetings. We had not the faintest clue that our unit would go from 30 people, to just the one. I'm disgusted on their behalf. You knew. I know you were told not to tell, but you knew, and your bosses knew. So while my role is about to finish, I would hope that you would express to your bosses my disgust and expectation that they would treat my remaining colleagues with far more respect and dignity than they have been given thus far.

Or something to that effect. It was highly emotional and while I spoke with civility, I was very angry.

I have always said I supported the government's decision on the restructure. It was not an easy decision, but I think it will be good for the future of the Queensland Government and how it is run. Furthermore, a loss of 20,000 jobs out of 200,000 is only 10% of the workforce. There are still 180,000 or so people employed with the Queensland Government. I hope that the restructure will make the government more efficient, remove any old and unnecessary projects, and renew growth and focus.

But…

I remain disgusted with the manner in which the Queensland Government, and in particular its political figureheads, put their political popularity ahead of the very people who voted them in. I would have respected the government if it had been upfront with the coming changes. If they had warned us of what was going to happen. They would have been unpopular for a time, given anyone's naturally bitter feelings about losing their job. But in the longer term, they would have at least been an honest and transparent government that had treated its staff with respect and dignity. As it stands, they've run roughshod over the very people they claim to serve. They lied and dissembled and prevaricated until the very last second. After writing this I find I feel saddened and resigned to the wilfully blind contempt shown us by leaders so inured to the humane treatment of the people whenever their political stock is threatened.

Right here is the point of my submission: Why I wrote in about my experiences. I'll keep it brief so the boffins cannot miss it. I have some vague hope that you lot will care less about your political ambitions, and care more about the people you're meant to be serving. You know - the 20,000 you just piddled on in an effort to slash the budget. A worthy end, but the means left a lot to be desired. You snatched the ball and chose to emphasise the M and the E in TEAM, instead of giving us the old Aussie "Fair Go". Is that too much to ask? I hardly think so.

You might wonder if I would ever go back to work for the Queensland Government. Yes, probably. There are some amazing people there – and pardon my black humour, but there were quite a few

more back when I first started. We will go on. We have survived this restructure as we have done past restructures. We've also done our best to see the work we left carried on, in some form or another. That's the silliest part of this whole restructure business. It happened so quickly, that many necessary services and projects – not just the old and inefficient ones – were wiped out. My unit, for instance, which was key to putting doctors and nurses in regional and rural hospitals, thus saving the districts millions in money, time and resources, was one of these. Now the 17 districts have to put together their own employee recruitment teams, which will cost them millions in wages, time and resources. I imagine units like mine will soon be back up and running; though of course under new names. The government will present them like some gift to the people, saying how they are supporting the regions and look at what a fine job they are doing of running this state.

Pardon my sarcasm, but on that day I and everyone else will be thinking: Yeah. Right