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# ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Surgeons assess one party's response to their concerns

**Wednesday 17 October, 2012**

In the lead up to the ACT election this Saturday, Canberra surgeons have endeavoured to raise issues of concern with the Government and Opposition. As at 10:00am today, only the Gallagher Labor Government had responded.

On September 25 the ACT Regional Chair of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Dr Hodo Haxhimolla, wrote to the Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher, and the Opposition Leader, Zed Seselja, asking them to outline their proposed solutions to five problems confronting the ACT's health system.

These are:

- The need for an orthopaedic "step-down" facility in which Canberrans recovering from orthopaedic surgery could recover, thereby reducing the incidence and severity of bed-block;
- The need for much greater IT interoperability between Canberra and Calvary Hospitals;
- The limited plastic surgery and microsurgery services currently available in the ACT;
- Threats to the future of outpatient clinics at Canberra's public hospitals; and
- The issue of car parking at the National Capital Private Hospital, which is a major obstacle to the proposed expansion of the facility.

The College received a response from the Chief Minister on 3 October. This outlined the Government's initiatives to date and included an undertaking to see hospital capacity rise to more than 1,100 beds over its next term should it be re-elected.

While the Government has no plans for a "step-down" facility for orthopaedic patients, it did seek further information on the proposal from the College and noted that the proposed University of Canberra Hospital will provide sub-acute and rehabilitation services.

The Chief Minister detailed some initiatives which have been undertaken, or are in progress, aimed at integrating IT systems at Canberra and Calvary Hospitals.

Dr Haxhimolla said he was particularly pleased that the College had been invited by the Chief Minister to work with the Government, should it be re-elected, to address the shortage of plastic surgeons in Canberra.

"With only limited plastic surgery being done in the ACT, and this by locums, too many patients are having to be transferred to Sydney," he said. "The Chief Minister has indicated that efforts are being made to fill vacant positions on a permanent basis and has asked the College to help it establish an accredited trainee position in this specialty. This is a positive approach."

**Media inquiries: Michael Barrett, Manager Media & Public Relations  
0429 028 933 or (03) 9249 1263**

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The Government's response on the issue of outpatient clinics was less definite, with vague references to 'consolidation of certain services'. Dr Haxhimolla said the existence of viable outpatient clinics at both of Canberra's public hospitals was vital to ensuring no single facility was overwhelmed.

"It is also essential to the education of trainee surgeons and registrars because outpatient clinics provide an invaluable opportunity to be a part of the earliest stage of the surgical process – diagnosis and case planning. In other jurisdictions where the closure of outpatient clinics has occurred, the effect on surgical training has been disastrous," he said. "The College calls on the Government, should it be returned, to commit to ongoing support of outpatients."

With regard to the issue of car parking, the Chief Minister wrote that a review of parking at Canberra Hospital is underway, that additional parking is required at both Canberra and Calvary Public Hospitals, and that the relevant Directorates will work with HealthScope with a view to resolving problems associated with the proposed expansion of National Capital Private Hospital.

Dr Haxhimolla said that, generally, the College had been impressed by the tone and detail of the Government's response to its questions. "There was a willingness to work with the College to address areas of concern and a plan of sorts for the future."

Dr Haxhimolla contrasted this with the failure of the Opposition to respond at all to the College's concerns.

"It is to be regretted that, despite knowing the exact date of the election for the last four years, having been given nearly three weeks to answer five questions, and having been telephoned several times, the Opposition was unwilling or unable to provide a response," he said. "Surgeons in the ACT will be disappointed to learn that on an issue as fundamental as public health the Opposition appears unready to assume the challenges of office."

Dr Haxhimolla's letters, and the Government's response, are available on the ACT regional page of the College's website at: [www.surgeons.org](http://www.surgeons.org)

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