



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

WA surgeons secure undertakings from major parties

Wednesday 6 March, 2013

Western Australian surgeons have welcomed undertakings from both major political parties that they will be consulted on key challenges confronting the state's public health system.

The Western Australian chair of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Mr Robert Love, said the undertakings arose from the parties' responses to a series of questions posed by the College in the lead up to Saturday's state election.

"These questions addressed issues of concern to WA surgeons and their patients," Mr Love said. "These include a well-recognised shortage of specialist surgeons per capita, and the critical shortage anticipated within five years. We need to create more surgical training posts in secondary hospitals, and public hospital appointments for Trainees completing their training, to stem the flow of doctors into private practice or the eastern states."

"The College is keen to be involved in the establishment of surgical units for all sub-specialties at the new Fiona Stanley Hospital. And the College remains very concerned about the Four Hour Rule, which requires all patients presenting at the emergency departments of public hospitals to be admitted, transferred or discharged within four hours. The College has always argued that the rule can only be safely implemented if there is investment in staffing and resources across the entire hospital. Failure to do this merely shifts problems and pressures to another part of the hospital, seriously compromising patient care.

"A comprehensive review of the rule was conducted in December 2011 but we are still waiting an update on the implementation of its recommendations," Mr Love said.

"While the response the College received from the Health Minister, Dr Hames, was rather short, it did give us some key undertakings. If re-elected, the government will continue to work collaboratively with the College on the Specialist Workforce Capacity Program, which aims to identify and address projected medical workforce shortages. The College will also be consulted on a proposal to increase the number of general surgical training posts. And we have received an undertaking from the government that the medical colleges will be consulted on issues of recruitment and accreditation at Fiona Stanley Hospital.

"Similarly, while the response from the Leader of the Opposition, Mr McGowan, was short on detail it did include the key undertaking to consult the College on issues pertaining to the surgical workforce, surgical training, and the Fiona Stanley Hospital," Mr Love said.

"With regard to the Four Hour Rule, Dr Hames indicated that a final progress report will be finalised in April of this year, detailing the implementation of the recommendations arising from the review of the rule. Mr McGowan said that, if elected, Labor would make the implementation of the recommendations a priority.

"The College is delighted that both the government and the opposition have committed themselves to ongoing consultation with surgeons on matters of importance to Western Australian patients. Having said that, the College will continue to monitor the evolution of the Four Hour Rule to ensure it does not further compromise patient safety."

Mr Love said the parties' responses, which are available on the College website's Western Australian page (www.surgeons.org), will enable surgeons and patients to make a more informed choice at this Saturday's poll.

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