



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

South Australian surgeons appraise competing health policies

Wednesday 17 March, 2010

South Australian surgeons are well placed to appraise and compare the health policies of the Government and Opposition in the lead-up to Saturday's state election, after the major parties forwarded responses to specific questions posed by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

Questions asked of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition were identical and ranged across the following issues:

- The role of specialist medical colleges in new arrangements for the registration of health professionals and the accreditation of medical education courses;
- Reducing elective surgery waiting lists;
- Ensuring adequate surgical services for regional and rural South Australia;
- Attracting and retaining world class medical staff, maintaining clinical standards, ensuring teaching and research capacity, and providing sufficient beds; and
- Sustaining and developing South Australian hospital campuses.

The response provided by the Minister for Health, the Hon. John Hill MP, was thorough and directly addressed the questions asked. It outlined the Government's achievements to date and detailed the initiatives that would be implemented should the Rann Government be re-elected.

The response from the Opposition was less detailed, listing the lump sums that would be spent in broad areas of the health portfolio. Unfortunately this response did not, in the main, directly address the questions posed by the College and, although dated 16 March, indicated more health policy announcements are still to be made. The timing of any such announcements must surely preclude detailed consideration of their value before polling day.

The College's South Australian Regional Chair, Dr James Edwards said it was important that both responses had endorsed the role of the specialist medical colleges. "It is particularly heartening that both parties have made a commitment to the ongoing role of the colleges in the training and assessment of specialists. The colleges have ensured world class medical care for generations of South Australians so this commitment is particularly significant."

Referring to the Government's response, Dr Edwards said parts of it had obvious merit but it was essentially a reiteration of a plan that is political rather than consultative. "There is a tradition of excluding clinicians from the strategic planning process and I'm concerned that, once again, we have been offered a health policy prepared by politicians and bureaucrats with little if any input from doctors and health professionals," he said.

With regard to the Opposition's response, Dr Edwards said that it was clear that, if elected, the Liberal Party had definite ideas about which Labor initiatives it would undo. "It is less clear, however, what the Liberals' alternative strategy for fixing the health system is."

"Generally, both responses reflect an attitude that healthcare investment should be dictated by political expediency rather than clinical need. This is to be regretted – South Australians deserve better," Dr Edwards said.

Dr Edwards thanked both parties for responding to the College's questions and urged South Australian Fellows to consider the respective responses. These are publicly available on the South Australian Region's page of the College website: www.surgeons.org

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