



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

Tasmanian health policies assessed by surgeons

Thursday 18 March, 2010

The health policies of the Tasmanian Government and the Opposition have been assessed and compared by surgeons in the lead-up to Saturday's state election. Responding to questions from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition addressed issues of particular interest to Tasmanian surgeons.

The 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 Tasmania; and
- The future of Royal Hobart Hospital.

The College's Tasmanian Regional Chair, Dr Greg Harvey, said he was pleased that both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition had stated categorically that the specialist medical colleges should continue to play their central role in the maintenance of medical standards.

"At a time when new arrangements for the registration of health professionals and the accreditation of medical training courses are being implemented, it is important that the role of the colleges, and their proven commitment to medical excellence, be recognised and maintained," Dr Harvey said.

Dr Harvey commended both parties for providing detailed responses which directly addressed the questions asked.

"The response from the Premier was thorough, but it did tend to concentrate on things done rather than the things that need to be done.

"Surgeons are also asking how the Government's plan to remove a highly efficient and productive private hospital will benefit the people of Hobart. Hobart Private Hospital does 10,000 cases a year.

This frees up public beds for the use of other patients. The plans outlined will take years to be implemented and the Government must explain where these 10,000 cases will be accommodated in the meantime.

“I also ask how this proposal sits with the Prime Minister’s stated aim of treating public patients in private services and, for that matter, training more specialists in the private sector?”

“I also note the Government’s promise to ‘clear’ waiting lists. Where will these operations be done and who will do them?” Dr Harvey asked.

Referring to the response provided by the Opposition Leader, Dr Harvey said it was unrealistic to claim that additional expenditure of just \$10 million could clear the backlog of patients waiting longer than clinically recommended for their operations, using spare capacity in private hospitals.

“I suspect this proposal has not been properly researched, and that clinicians have not had sufficient input. I don’t believe that surgeons have the time to do these additional operations,” he said.

“I do note, however, that the Opposition’s response was the only one to make reference to the pressing need to train the increasing number of medical graduates.

“And I welcome the fact that the Opposition does not propose to take over the Hobart Private Hospital – an excellent facility which treats thousands of Tasmanians while having fewer beds and theatres than the Royal Hobart Hospital,” Dr Harvey said.

The responses of both the Government and Opposition are publicly available on the Tasmanian Region’s page of the College website: www.surgeons.org

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