



**AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
(SOUTH AUSTRALIA) INC**

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Country Health Plan raises Key Questions

AMA(SA) President Dr Peter Ford today publicly raised questions around the role of the new GP Plus Emergency Hospitals under the Country Health Plan.

There are a range of issues the AMA(SA) is keen to meet with the Minister to discuss over the plan, and clarifying the proposed role of the GP Plus Emergency Hospitals is one of them,' said Dr Ford.

'GP Plus Emergency Hospitals' is the new name to be given to the smaller regional hospitals, which we have been advised will no longer have in-patient facilities. The AMA(SA) has some initial concerns that the term 'GP Plus Emergency Hospital,' could be misleading for the local communities and tourists alike.

The term 'Emergency Hospital' risks misleading the public, particularly in cases of a genuine emergency. The term suggests a high level medical response is available; that it is the place to automatically go to in a medical emergency and all other cases of illness or injury. But under the Country Health Plan, the GP Plus Emergency Hospitals are designated to become 'casualty clearing stations' only.

Then, the Country Health Plan provides that '*GP Plus Emergency Hospitals will develop services in line with community needs, providing the foundation for increased support for GPs to manage chronic disease.*' Once again, in this context if the focus is on chronic disease management, the term 'Emergency Hospital' is potentially a misnomer.

There needs to be very careful consideration given to any decision to remove in-patient facilities altogether from these hospitals which are serving the health needs of their country communities.

Dr Ford said he was also very concerned about the potential loss of doctors from those towns where their hospitals are to be downgraded. How can we ensure premium health services are provided to these communities?

'Rural doctors value being able to work in, and admit their patients to their local hospital. We are concerned that if the ability for doctors to admit patients, for instance, for overnight observation, goes, then some doctors will choose to practice rural medicine elsewhere. Ultimately that would be a bad thing for the patients of country South Australia.'

Dr Ford said that the AMA(SA) was keen to raise its concerns and questions on the Country Health Plan with the Health Minister at the earliest opportunity.

12 June 2008

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