

Ms Robyn Kruk,
The Director General,
Department of New South Wales Health,
Locked Mail Bag 961,
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

Thursday 3rd November, 2005



**RURAL HEALTH MATTERS.
THE STATE OF HOSPITALS & HEALTH SERVICES IN
THE TUMUT DISTRICT**

Dear Ms Kruk,

The citizens of Tumut, Batlow and district wish to bring to your attention the advanced state of decay of the hospitals at both Tumut and Batlow. Both hospitals are unsafe, inefficient and in need of immediate replacement.

We appreciate the work done by Greater South Area Health administrators in formulating the new "Tumut Health Services Plan 2006 - 2011" and we thank you for the opportunity for community consultation in that process.

The ever growing cost of providing health services, including buildings and highly technical equipment, is something we are acutely aware of. However, it is our belief that if action to build new hospitals at Tumut and Batlow is not taken immediately, the immense efforts undertaken to bring our economy to its present booming state will be placed in jeopardy. Indeed, we fear our economy will go backwards as a direct result of any further procrastination on behalf of the NSW Government and your administration.

The refurbishment, and possible minor alterations to Tumut District Hospital mentioned in the THS Plan are in our opinion yet another "bandaid" for problems which have festered for decades, hence our campaign slogan.

The citizens of this area genuinely believed, on the basis of promises and statements from past health and government administrations, that a new hospital at Tumut would have been at the point of construction now. Instead, according to the Tumut Health Services Plan, there is no prospect of this happening for many years. In the meantime, Tumut Shire Council, businesses and residents have acted in good faith, entered into vast investments and established flourishing commercial enterprises.

The provision of a new, modern hospital equipped with the latest appropriate technology is essential to the continuance and stability of this progress. Industry does not survive with outmoded technology and buildings. Neither can a hospital function safely, efficiently or effectively without sound buildings and modern technological support.

The citizens of this district have reached a point where they feel enough is enough. We can no longer rely on promises. We seek concrete evidence of commitment from the NSW Government and NSW Department of Health to build a new hospital at both Tumut and Batlow without further delay.

We believe that with the provision of a new hospital, services such as a publicly funded medical imaging centre serving the whole district could be located at Tumut Hospital, thus relieving residents of the danger and inconvenience of travelling round trips of up to 400kms. Based on a well researched business plan, we believe such a centre would be viable and save the government, (and patients), much money. The economy of the area would also gain. But it cannot happen without a new hospital.

Many doctors, nurses and allied health professionals have understandably already left to work in more modern hospitals elsewhere. Our existing medical staff are being put under increasing strain, largely due to the decaying infrastructure and lack of appropriate technological support.

The problems, you would already be familiar with. They include:

- asbestos, (in difficult locations)
- gaping holes in exterior cladding,
- water leaking down walls during heavy rain,
- serious space constraints,
- lack of or inadequate office facilities for allied health professionals,
- poor drainage causing water dams in roofing during rain,
- many changes in floor levels, the cause of accidents
- inappropriate floor coverings which can potentially harbour disease,
- inadequate computer systems, with potential lethal consequences for patients
- inadequate and unsanitary ward toilet and shower facilities,
- overcrowding in wards
- serious risk of cross infection
- no line of sight from emergency to nurses' station
- no ongoing staffing of emergency (if the bell is not heard, patients are left to their own devices).
- inadequate facilities for emergency resuscitation in A & E
- no privacy for grieving relatives and friends, or the reception of mentally ill patients
- maternity - lack of privacy, perceived risk of cross infection from other wards & visitors, "medicalisation" of a natural process since the closure of Sheahan House, lack of space, poor lighting, inadequate sound insulation, lack of anaesthetist, no ultrasound available for emergency use despite doctors having necessary training.
- difficult access to modern, reliable, affordable ultrasound. Patients are being asked to travel to the only private operator in Wagga Wagga and pay full fees up front on the day of service or face a penalty, no bulk billing for anyone. Some small business operators have to close their shops and lose a day's takings. Cancer patients etc. who need multiple ultrasounds face major financial difficulty. Some fees are up to \$365. Many residents go to the ACT or Albury for medical imaging now and these statistics are not, we believe, reflected in the THS Plan.
- Inadequate, ugly morgue and inappropriate location which causes distress to many.

These are but a few of the problems.

As the head administrator of public health in the state of NSW we respectfully ask that you reconsider the question of the immediate replacement of Tumut District Hospital as a matter of urgency.

In the national interests, this matter should also be the concern of the Commonwealth Government especially as new networks of medical communications technology linked nationally and internationally begin to be established in Australia. We believe rural areas should be given special funding to help establish the hardware needed for these new systems. For the first time in history of Australia, technology has the capacity to liberate rural communities from the tyranny of distance and vastly improve our access to expert medical advice and diagnostic equipment.

Are people who live in rural areas around Australia going to miss out on this new era because our Federal and State Governments did not come to our assistance at the appropriate time ?

On behalf of the undersigned, and those who signed a letter earlier this week to Mr John Hatzistergos, Minister for Health, we invite you to visit Tumut to discuss the matter with residents and members of the various committees and campaigners who are so concerned by this issue. Batlow residents would also welcome further discussions about the replacement of their hospital.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs S J Swann & Mrs P Webb
Coordinators for Concerned Citizens of Tumut Shire
P O Box 132
TUMUT NSW 2720

cc. Ms. Katrina A. Hodgkinson, MP, Member for Burrinjuck
The Hon. A.J.Abbott, MP, Federal Minister for Health
Ms. Julia Gillard, MP, Shadow Federal Minister for Health
The Hon. S.P.Ley, MP, Member for Farrer
Assoc. Prof. Stuart Schneider, CE, GSAHS
Mr David Watson, Editor, Tumut & Adelong Times

Encl: Signatures of concerned citizens