

SUBSTITUTION FOR DOCTORS

Background

Tasmania has a health system with highly trained and motivated medical staff. Poor workforce planning by the Tasmanian Government has led to shortfalls in the number and location of medical specialists. The Tasmanian Government has commenced trialing independent nurse practitioners in Tasmania to substitute for doctors.

Key Issues for Patients

Substitution of nurses for doctors will reduce the quality of the health care for Tasmanians. It is a sacrifice of health quality in pursuit of quantity and the cheaper option. It does not deal with the excessive and preventable doctor shortage. Who do you want to see a sick child, a nurse or a doctor?

The best answer for Tasmanians is to develop a team based system under the leadership of a medical practitioner. There exists substantial scope for nurses to develop their clinical skills in General Practices. Nurses employed by General Practitioners will extend the breadth of primary care available to patients and free doctors to improve access to more complex care.

Key Issues for Governments

The Government does not acknowledge that there are significant limitations on the extent of tasks that can be taken out of the hands of medical practitioners or away from their supervision. Many local signs and symptoms are indicative of more general disease and even if appropriate treatment is initiated it is less likely that non medical practitioners will have the education or expertise to recognize, diagnose and manage complications of their therapeutic interventions.

The Government needs to review the unnecessary implementation of Nurse Practitioners to substitute for doctors. The Tasmanian Medical School is doubling its intake and will in time address the need for independent Nurse Practitioners.

AMA Position

The Tasmanian public wants and deserves the best possible health system regardless of their geographic location or economic circumstances. The AMA does not support independent nurse practitioners or as substitutes for General Practitioners.

The AMA supports the role of the nurse developing additional clinical skills in complementing and adding value to the General Practitioner. This GP led team based approach will deliver better health and medical services to the people of Tasmania.