

Get NSW Back in Front



PROTECTING PATIENTS' RIGHTS

GREATER PROTECTION FOR PATIENTS
AND THEIR FAMILIES



THE NATIONALS

PROTECTING PATIENT RIGHTS

GREATER PROTECTION FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

The NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition believes that the needs of patients must have priority in the running of the hospital system. In government, we will ensure that what happens in a hospital is organised with patient interest foremost and with the goal of achieving best possible results from treatment being of primary importance.

We will ensure greater transparency in a hospital system that is open and accountable.

WHAT NEW SOUTH WALES DESERVES

Patients and the public deserve to have a hospital system that they have confidence in. They need to know that they will be looked after by staff that are qualified and well supported so that they are not run off their feet and disillusioned.

Patients need to know that the hospital system is geared toward meeting patient needs before 'the bottom line' or even the convenience of staffing arrangements.

They should have access to information that will allow individuals to make up their own minds about how hospitals are faring without the interference of government 'spin'.

They should know what to expect and what is expected of them.

They have the right to be treated with respect and dignity, as is provided for in the Private Patients Hospital Charter.¹

In the words of the introduction to the Victorian Hospital Services Report September quarter 2003"

*'Consumers, health care providers and government all need information on the quality of health services. Public access to information assists consumers to understand the health care system, it assists providers of health services in planning and increases the accountability of the Department of Human Services to the people in the state of Victoria, Australia.'*²

¹ <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/health-privatehealth-consumers-charter-index.htm>

² Hospital Services Report (Victoria) September quarter 2003 (JS files)

THE NSW LIBERAL/NATIONALS COALITION PLAN TO PROTECT PATIENTS' RIGHTS

In government we will implement two initiatives that will provide greater protection for the rights of patients and their families.

1. Issuing Patient Rights and Responsibilities Protocols

Hospitals will be required to display protocols where they can be clearly seen and to hand them to patients as they are admitted. The Protocols will spell out that patients can expect to be:

- Given reasonable access to safe health services.
- Fully informed about their specific treatment and when it will occur.
- Given priority to treatment based on clinical assessment of urgency and need
- Kept up to date about changes in treatment times, or delays (especially in Emergency Departments)
- Treated with respect and in a caring manner.
- Have their rights to privacy assured.
- Given easy access to support services, including sensitive individuals who can handle problems with the option of accessing the independent complaints process if they consider it necessary.
- Invited to provide feedback through patient surveys.

2. Quarterly Hospital Services Reports

Hospitals will be required to publish quarterly Hospital Services Reports that will make hospital procedures far more transparent and therefore open to greater scrutiny and increased accountability.

Quarterly Hospital Services Reports will help patients and the public to understand what is happening in hospitals by providing information, with quarterly comparisons, about matters such as:

- How many beds are available?
- How many people are on elective surgery waiting lists?
- How many people on elective surgery waiting lists have waited longer than ideal?
- How many patients are admitted to hospital for elective surgery?
- How many patients are treated in emergency departments?
- How many emergency patients are treated within recommended times?
- How many emergency patients are admitted to hospital?
- How many patients stay for extended times in the emergency department?

AFTER TWELVE YEARS LABOR HAS FAILED

Under Labor, patients have been victims of record waiting lists for elective surgery and long waits for emergency treatment.

Rather than being focussed on getting treatment for their patients, too many health bureaucrats give priority to making it look as though waiting lists have gone down to please their political masters. Sometimes this means 'not counting' patients who are still waiting for surgery!³

It can also mean that the government has introduced measures so that patients are not counted at all – as was revealed in a leaked letter instructing doctors that *'patients can only be added to the waiting list provided the procedure can be undertaken within the clinical priority timeframe.'*⁴

Hospital data (waiting lists and Emergency Department performance) is published on the NSW Health website but only for the most recently reported month. This means no comparison can be made about improvements or deficiencies and leads to misleading claims being made by a government which has become addicted to 'spin'.

The same applies in Emergency Departments, where patients often wait for long periods before even being seen by the triage nurse – because that's the moment the clock starts ticking in meeting 'time seen' benchmarks.⁵

There have also been complaints that a shortage of resources means that hospital are more focussed on the 'bottom line' than about patient care.

In a September 23 2005 letter announcing his resignation from Royal North Shore Hospital, Associate Professor Lali Sekhon, the former head of complex spinal neurosurgery wrote: *"The refocusing of hospital and Northern Sydney Area Health priorities on administrative benchmarks and saving money, and away from patient care, is one of the main reasons I tendered my resignation from the hospital and why I will leave the Australian medical sphere."*⁶

Patients regularly complain to the Opposition about a lack of attention to hygiene, with dirty floors, unchanged bed linen, unwashed hands and filthy toilets.

They complain of food that can't be eaten because there is no-one to help the patient unwrap the sandwiches or balance the hot cup of tea or simply because of the tastelessness of what is offered.⁷

They complain of lack of basic supplies such as pillows, blankets and bandages.⁸

³ NSW Health website last page Category 9 'not ready for care' : <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/waitingtimes/pdfs/current.pdf>

⁴ Letter to doctors from the Clinical Chair, Division of Surgery, John Hunter Hospital July 20th 2006

⁵ Thomas Lynn Port Macq ED complaint 7 April 06.doc (JS files corro/2006/Apr)

⁶ 'Bureaucrats blasted on spinal unit' SMH September 24 2005

⁷ 'Plastic for Patients' Many Daily October 13 2005

⁸ 2GB, 28 March 2006

Patients and their families are also frustrated that complaints get sent in circles, disappear into the health bureaucracy and remain unresolved months later.

Keeping patients in the dark is not only frustrating for the patient - secrecy and lack of transparency have led to unreported, and therefore unresolved problems, including infection spread in hospitals, mistakes and even unnecessary deaths.⁹

While it is acknowledged that medical staff bear the brunt of dangerously high levels of demand in an inadequately resourced and over-stretched system, it is unacceptable for them to ill-treat patients just as it is unacceptable for patients to disregard their workloads and responsibilities for many.

⁹ Girl's death 'a comedy of errors', SMH Nov 30 05
<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/girls-death-a-comedy-of-errors/2005/11/29/1133026469457.html>