

10 June 2008

**Important questions for the SA Health Minister, John Hill MP,  
regarding the South Australian Country Health Plan 2007-16**

The RDASA appreciates that the State Government has the role and responsibility to determine what acute services are provided to rural south Australians.

The rural doctors who live and work in these communities have a responsibility for the health and well being of the people who live in rural towns. On this basis we seek further information from the State Government and the Department of Health to allow us to explain to our communities what the rationale for this decision making is, to allow us to do that we ask that you provide us with the following information.

Please respond to the following questions in writing to the RDASA (Rural Doctors Association of South Australia).

1. What objective clinical criteria have been applied to the decision making that underpins this plan?
2. Specifically, what have been the clinical determinations that describe the minimum service levels that should be provided for patient care in rural hospitals based on the advice of the Clinical Networks?
3. What is the economic modelling that has demonstrated the capacity to reallocate funding in the new plan which will increase health services to rural patients?
4. What has been the objective evidence utilised to plan for the provision of services in relation to clinical care of patients and the impact on the rural workforce? Please outline what the nursing staffing ratio and nursing profile will be for caring for aged care, and acute emergency presentations to rural health units.
5. What costings have been developed under the plan in relation to transfers and the cost of using retrieval teams from metropolitan hospitals?
6. RDASA understands that rural doctors may be invited to attend a briefing session and help to "shape the future of country health care services". Is this simply a briefing session or is it a genuine consultation process? If it is a genuine consultation process, why is the timeframe for consultation so short? And what specifically will you be consulting on?
7. RDASA understand that the current Australia Health Care Agreements (AHCAs) have been extended while the new AHCAs are being negotiated. Are you intending to renegotiate the responsibility for the provision of emergency services in the GP Plus Emergency Centres?
8. Have you discussed with the Federal Health Minister - Minister Roxon your intention that you may remove inpatient activity from up to 43 rural locations, which may also remove the capacity to service emergency activity in a timely fashion and impact on the capacity to provide primary health services?

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9. In your submission to the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) did you declare your intention to reduce the level of services delivered locally to the 43 rural communities listed in your plan?
10. Please provide us with specific modelling and research that this plan will result in improved health outcomes for patients in Country SA.
11. There is a substantial body of research that underlines the high quality and safety of care provided in rural hospitals, the excellent health outcomes for those who are treated in rural hospitals, and the higher risk to some patients (depending on their specific condition) if they are transferred to a larger centre. Could the Minister please advise what literature has been sourced and considered to underpin the Government's decision-making?

Given the very short period available for consultation, we would appreciate your written response within seven days to these important questions.

In the interim the RDASA will be advising all resident rural doctors to inform their patients and communities that we are awaiting this important information so that we might provide them with the clinical evidence that supports your decision making.

Yours sincerely

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