

17 March 2008

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Dear Amy

Re: Draft Discussion Paper on Statewide Retrieval Services

The Rural Doctors Association of SA recognises the excellent work that has been done over many years by the retrieval teams based in Adelaide. It also recognises the importance of this service in providing support for rural communities, rural hospitals and rural medical practitioners and emergency services and assisting in the management of critically ill patients.

Many rural doctors have had experience and training in stabilisation of the seriously ill patient and wish to continue to provide these services, however in some communities there are doctors who are not as experienced or feel as confident in the stabilisation of critically ill patients and other towns have health services that may not have a rural doctor present in their town 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

There are many challenges in providing care for patients in emergency situations and in the paper presented, the Rural Doctors Association of SA believe it is essential that communication is one of the key components of the new retrieval service. In particular, the ability to talk directly to retrieval consultants is an essential part of the retrieval process and that in many cases rural doctors are keen to receive advice over the phone as to whether the patient can be managed locally or whether a retrieval team is necessary to be dispatched to a rural location.

The feedback from many rural doctors is that the adult retrieval services have provided a high standard of care and that on many occasions have communicated well with rural general practitioners. The feedback has also revealed that the key area of concern was in neonatal and obstetric advice and retrieval. This has been an area of concern for many rural doctors for many years and essentially any new retrieval service should provide the capacity for rural doctors to discuss clinical problems with senior clinicians without the long delays that are currently experienced.

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The key components of the new system proposed should be that the receiving doctors have some understanding of the location and capabilities of the medical and emergency teams in a particular rural location so that appropriate location specific advice can be given. The understanding that in some rural locations there may be highly experienced medical, nursing and paramedical teams whereas in other areas there may be very few emergency services. In this situation the necessity to utilise video conferencing links to assist those hospitals would be an essential part of the service provision for retrieval patients. Currently the utilisation of video conference links is patchy across rural South Australia and there has been some positive feedback from those doctors who utilise this service. Positive feedback has also been received by those doctors who have been able to teleconference with both the aeromedical consultant and the SA Ambulance Services to provide optimum delivery of service, utilising the transport and medical retrieval services and local service available.

The Rural Doctors Association of SA believes that an adequately trained retrieval physician is an essential part of the retrieval team. In the past, the intensive care or clinical care nurses have also provided a good team structure to the retrieval team.

The proposition of starting an Emergency Response Program utilising a select group of regional and remote doctors to be available to respond to out of hospital accidents or emergencies in the region, is a proposal worth further consideration. This would involve ensuring that there is adequate training, support and communication and IT links available for doctors involved in providing this service.

The Rural Doctors Association of SA also believes that there should be a practising rural doctor on the SARS advisory committee who can provide feedback to the Senior Clinical Advisory Group and also be a conduit for information back to doctors involved in management of critically ill patients in rural South Australia.

Yours sincerely

Steve Holmes
President
Rural Doctors Association of South Australia