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Submission to the ACT Governments GP Taskforce consultation.

"Our community must pull together"

"We want a concrete campaign that will bring a doctor to this part of Tuggeranong Valley and it starts today" Nick Tsoulis. Canberra Times 2/12/2007-

doctors4tuggeranong@hotmail.com email was established to reassure Tuggeranong residents and businesses that hope is on the way to bring doctors to suburban areas in the Tuggeranong valley.

The hope factor is an integral part of any community and the fundamental aspiration of society. Whilst we make difficult changes to accommodate growth in our National Capital, **we must never forget that while we have a 'super highway' leading us away from our suburbs and leading us somewhere away from Canberra... I hope we keep in mind that there are the smaller roads, which we know exactly where they lead to our people. (Like our suburban doctors)**

Doctors4tuggeranong with the support of the Tuggeranong Community Council and local media are hoping a community email will be a valuable contact and thus will be the ears for doctors to hear and eyes for doctors to read.

In consideration the basis of our campaign that we are currently focusing on are many concerns by residents whom feel issues important to them is having proper access to treatment, access to their own doctor, assurance over the confidentiality of their medical records, and supporting the re- established GP Clinics of Calwell and Wanniasa suburbs.

The Calwell suburb along with Theodore and Richardson suburbs are the gateway to the ACT for Canberra's tourists and travellers entering southbound from the Monaro Highway. They expect to find a medical centre at their first point of call in the ACT. This is a fact as many tourists on many occasions thought Calwell Shopping Centre is 'Tuggeranong Hyperdome' (where are the services?) It is ok when we re-direct them, but in an emergency where do you re-direct them to, only to get lost and confused as they migrate into the suburbs further.

Our society comprises of local traders, residents and shoppers from Calwell, Richardson and Theodore, which feel the area in this part of Tuggeranong lacks in GP's far greater than any other part of Tuggeranong, which also services outlying areas on the Monaro Highway, Royalla, and as far as Bredbo. We also feel there is an acute need for a Dentist, as there is no Dentist in this part of South Tuggeranong, in fact no dentist South of Isabella Drive. These are the people's needs. Without proper health we cannot work, we cannot send our children to school, and society would stop. This is why we need a guarantee that Doctors in ten years will be coming to Tuggeranong and who will make that guarantee.

Fine we have medical schools in place and we will be inundated with Doctors but the same old arguments will exist unless we listen to the people needs and more recently our local suburban doctors needs.

Doctors4tuggeranong recommends to the GP taskforce crucial support to the many remaining suburban GP's and their practices that we have left.

Our support for a proposal that could start tomorrow for attracting university trained doctors to our suburbs. We have engaged in talks with Dr Lee of the Erindale Medical Practice. Dr Lee has said the problem with finding doctors, like many other issues in life, boiled down to the almighty dollar, or, as he calls it, "economic realities" This should be considered very carefully.

"Dr Lee suggested that if the Act Government were to loan a university trained doctor \$100 000 to set up a practice this would help. Especially if they already have a huge HECS bill. Why would a young doctor, just out of university want to get into another \$150 000 debt to set up their own practice? ..When they could be paid a similar amount to join one of these medical centres-it just wouldn't make economical sense," and under his plan Dr Lee has referred to the \$100 000 loans would be reduced by 20 per cent each year for five years, leaving an established surgery for our suburb communities of 1000 people or more. Dr Lee said, should a Doctor decide to leave within the five year agreement, the loan would be repaid pro-rata, and the surgery would be filled by another physician. (In the case eof the West Belconnen Community Owned CO-OP, it would be the community continuing to own it)

Dr lee suggested the answers to most of the biggest problems were not as tough to come by as one may think. Interest free loans, doctor inspired knowledge of trouble spots and further support and incentive for young doctors to set up a private practice in an area of need, were key elements to his plan which many people to this date in our community have voiced strong support for, in particular at the Tuggeranong Community Council public health form in July 2009.

During recent meetings held by the doctors4tuggeranong the main issue that has been raised has been the number of geographical GP placements we have in our suburbs. The current argument is do we need all our GP's all in one 'hub' where you have to wait for up to hours to see a doctor, or should we be looking at re-establishing the family practice suburban model?

We feel there are enough doctors for both models, however it is important to take into consideration where funding is directed. It is commonly perceived that the suburban model is still the most personal way to get to know your doctor, and for your doctor to know you, however, there are arguments that support the larger 'super' clinics.

Current experiences raised by the by patients with concerns regarding the Super clinics, are that they have had to wait for up to 3 hours and then they had a very small time with their doctor. Packed lunches have been taken into the super clinics also **(please refer to the Southside Chronicle front page dated week beginning 28th July 2009 editor –Elliot Woods)**

Below is a letter from a patient sent to me in March 2009.

Chronicle Article

From:

 You may not know this sender. [Mark as safe](#) | [Mark as junk](#)

Sent: Tuesday, 21 October 2008 8:44:52 PM

To: doctors4tuggeranong@hotmail.com

Nick,

I read with interest the article in last week's Chronicle on what you are trying to do to attract doctors to Calwell. I moved to Banks from Monash 12 months ago, but retained my association with my doctor of 16 years at Monash. He and his wife sold their practice to Symbion knowing they would be moved to Symbion's facility at Wanniasa, but they felt this would be a minor inconvenience for their patients in terms of travelling time and a major benefit in regard to the other facilities Symbion could provide from this establishment. Unfortunately, Symbion were bought by Primary Health who have now closed the facility and moved them to Woden.

Currently, we are still fortunate to be able to make an appointment with our GP, although Don has been unable to work since the move as he is so depressed by Primary Health's unethical behaviour that he is physically ill whenever he tries to enter the establishment. Elderly friends of ours at Curtin had their GP close his practice and move to Primary Health at Woden, but he moved into the lower level where appointments cannot be made. They now take their lunch with them whenever visiting their GP because they often wait between 1 and 2.5 hours to see their GP. Primary Health is attempting to force our GPs into a similar arrangement and is treating them and their staff as second-class citizens.

These are highly trained professionals who no longer find it possible to work the enormously long hours in private practice. I am sure there are other highly qualified GPs out there that find themselves in a similar situation. There must be something that we can do to attract such doctors to the Valley. Whilst I understand your focus is obviously to attract GPs to Calwell, I would be happy just to have a quality GP south of Monash, provided it was a GP with whom I could make an appointment!

I am more than willing to help you in any way that I can, provided you intend that any such practice in Calwell has the flexibility to see a nominated doctor by appointment, albeit at additional cost.

If you wish to follow-up this offer, I may be contacted by any of the following forms:

Regards,

Doug Rankin

Below is another letter from an interested student, currently at the ANU who approached my committee and is wanting the support of our community, and if the time comes to setting up a medical centre in Calwell, she will be happy to do anything for our community. Currently Najia is my committee.

The advertising and strong campaign has allowed us to make direct contact with doctors from all over the world, and this is very beneficial for our community to have a simple contact email.

RE: GP Position

From:

Sent: Saturday, 28 February 2009 5:21:55 PM

To: Nicholas Tsoulas (doctors4tuggeranong@hotmail.com)

Dear Nick,

How are you? Thanks for all details. Yes I will be happy to start work as a GP, as I am thinking I am enough competitive to run my practice but there are some questions in my mind. I've done my MBBS in 2006 and I've one and a half year experience in clinical wards (Medicine, Paediatrics and Gynaecology Obstetrics) from Pakistan. For getting registration as a GP or doctor I've to go through AMC EXAM which I will definitely do very soon. I will apply for conditional registration because Calwell is an area of need position and do I need to have my own Medicare provider number. I've to ask all these things from RACGP or if you have any information regarding all this. It would be obliged to provide me these basic information.

I would be happy to chat with you and meet with you.

TA.

Cheers,

Najia Adnan

Below is another letter from a patient from the Wanniasa Medical Centre

Wanniasa GP

Sent: Monday, 23 March 2009 2:21:53 PM

To: doctors4tuggeranong@hotmail.com

I am a resident of Wanniasa and am very interested in the idea of attracting a doctor to the area following the disgraceful closure of the Wanniasa Medical Centre last year - I consider what Mr Bateman did quite immoral and certainly not in the interests of the community. I am not in favour of building another facility though as the government suggested, and would be very interested to hear what your idea is.

Thank you.

Sincerely

Margaret Larkin

Doctors4tuggeranong is planning various forums over the coming months and hoping to write to as many as 2000 doctors in Queensland and NSW.

Doctors4tuggeranong feels a recommendation of the following to the GP Taskforce;

- Special support measures including loan funding will be crucial to the existence of the remaining GP's and their medical centre that we have left.
- Whilst visits to the doctor are essential part of living, we feel the Act Government before setting up super clinics; take heed to all the community concerns, local doctors and community consultations. The community consultations are an integral part of how we feel, and we need to understand all the factors as to why the community should adapt and not the other way around.

- I am urging the GP Taskforce to realize that consultation appointments are continuing to be too expensive for many families and if there is any more loss of GPs from our area, then I can only say that reduced competition will mean fees charged which will continue to rise. This will then be out of the hands of the ACT health Minister once this is policy, a path of no return”
- I also feel that the idea that super-clinics would be more convenient is thus based on assumptions about the possibility of coordinating GPs' and other providers' schedules.
- Work with the people of ACT and encourage and support further funding for the establishment of community-owned medical centres in the south and this is evident where residents in Calwell and Wanniassa persuade the Bendigo Bank to open branches in the suburbs in 2002 after the big banks closed their branches. Like bank branches, doctors' surgeries until now have helped to support communities including creating trade for surrounding businesses. This will need to be taken into consideration when making planning decisions of any nature in the ACT.
- People want the traditional GP back in the suburbs, they want their medical records kept private, and they want to be treated like a patient by their name, they don't want to wait for hours in a super sized clinic.
- Our community must pull together and restore public confidence in suburban GP clinics after the large closures in Wanniassa, Kippax, and Calwell where each medical centre housed 8-12 doctors.
- The business community is listening and very involved and is considering all aspects of passing trade when making any decisions on centralizing medical centres. The business community have also attended various forums and we are getting the idea that we can work together and solve the GP issues of the day. I urge the ACT Government to consult with business also with regards to making any health policies in the future with respect to their trade. I do know two prominent businesses in Tuggeranong are ready to commit funding to offset set up costs. It would be god to match any set up cost with the proposed loan funding raised by DR Lee.
- That the task force taking into consideration employment factors. The rippling effect that any further super clinics established would only take employment and trade from our local-owned Chemists. We do not want to go down that road at this present time, however consideration should be taken into account. That any future closures, relocations of GP's in the valley will certainly take its toll on small business in the ACT.

I feel anything is possible if the community is well consulted. I strongly disagree with the super clinics and I support smaller, healthier medical centres with our own doctors and not doctors who we know we are not going to get at our next appointment. Whilst Canberra is growing, I feel we are living in an older community than we did 20 years ago, and unless public transport is entirely free for sick people, then the Government will need to look at bringing the doctor to their home. We will also support that if this is the case.

To a healthy and prosporeous outcome and thankyou to all the members of the ACT Governments GP taskforce for time involved with the submission.

Regards Nick Tsoulas
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