

**Submission to the standing committee on health, community and social services enquiry into the Calvary Public Hospital options.**

Dear Sir,

I would like to make the following submission to this committee regarding the issue of Calvary Public Hospital.

I have been involved in the practice of medicine in Canberra predominantly for the last 35 years, having undertaken my internship, basic training and some of my subsequent training in medicine here in the late 1970s, before working overseas for three years, followed by 18 months at Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney. I returned to Canberra, by choice, in 1983, to set up specialist medical practice, in associateship with colleagues from the then Woden Valley Hospital. I have been a visiting medical officer at Calvary Hospital since 1983. Given my close association with this hospital since that time, I have no doubt that I could be accused of having a biased point of view in relation to this institution. However, I would like to point out that this is not about "protecting my turf" because, even if another public hospital is built on this side of town, it will have absolutely no impact upon me or upon my practice. By the time it is built and ready to receive its first patients, I will be well and truly retired. Undoubtedly I will not be involved in delivering health care in any of the Canberra Hospital at that time; it is more likely I will be a consumer.

I do indeed hold Calvary Hospital in high regard, and I am proud of my involvement with the hospital, and The Little Company of Mary, in delivering healthcare over the years. I believe Calvary Hospital is ideally placed, both geographically, philosophically and in the hearts and minds of the majority of the Canberra community, to continue to provide quality health care to all in need, regardless of creed, colour or belief, now and in the foreseeable future. However I also have no doubt, that there are those in power, and those with certain political ideologies, and also some at other institutions, who cannot abide the philosophy of Calvary Healthcare, and would be delighted to see Calvary either shut down or marginalised-this would be short-sighted in the extreme. Members of minority parties, who hold certain views regarding this institution, may think they understand the theory of healthcare delivery but it is abundantly clear they do not understand the every day practicalities and problems of delivering healthcare, nor do they represent the majority of the Canberra community. They should not be able to sway the opinion of the elected government-to do so is an obscenity and an abuse of power.

I am personally appalled at the decision to even consider building another public hospital on the North side of Canberra. I initially thought that the cost of this venture would be approximately \$140 million; I am now reliably informed that it could be even over \$400 million and this is money that could be well spent elsewhere in this small jurisdiction. As a healthcare provider, and more importantly, as an ACT taxpayer, I would wish to register my complete disapproval of this proposal.

Those of us, who have worked in Canberra since the 1980s, well remember the problems of having three half-opened public hospitals, and the difficulties in adequately staffing these hospital with senior medical staff, not to mention junior medical staff. It is totally inefficient, and possibly even dangerous, to have physicians and surgeons scurrying between hospitals, attempting to care for patients in these institutions, as well as also being involved in caring for patients in the private hospitals in this town. There is no doubt, that the clinical expertise that is already stretched thinly would be even more diluted and this would lead to an inevitable decline in quality health care. It is difficult enough already to attract and retain quality healthcare professionals in this territory,

without introducing another level of complexity and difficulty, which undoubtedly will only serve to discourage medical practitioners from relocating to Canberra to set up practice

A lot of hard work, by those involved “at the coalface” has gone into establishing and maintaining good working relationships between the two hospitals-this was not always the case. To destroy those working relationships now would be folly in the extreme.

Canberra has always been a North side and the South side town, separated by the lake. Patients on the south side prefer to be admitted to The Canberra Hospital, and those on the north side prefer to be admitted to a hospital on this side of town. Calvary Hospital is ideally placed to deal with the current population on the north side and also will be able to cater for the emerging area of the Molonglo Valley-something that hospital in Gungahlin would not be able to do. Indeed as is abundantly clear, to anyone who has the eyes to see, even managing to get to Gungahlin by the available roads can be difficult and sometimes almost impossible. Despite the current roadwork, access to this area will always remain difficult at the best of times. The ACT already has two perfectly good public hospitals, which will always require support and ongoing maintenance, paid for by the taxpayer. The money that would be diverted into a third public hospital would be much better spent in upgrading, maintaining and ultimately expanding the facilities at Calvary Hospital, something that would benefit all ACT residents. Ultimately we are all potential consumers, even those who are currently health care providers.

I urge all members of The Assembly, to put aside preconceived ideas and party related prejudices and do what is best not only for Calvary Hospital, but for the ACT community in general. To build a third public hospital, in a city of this size, would be madness and ultimately those who make that decision will stand condemned by their foolishness.

Yours sincerely,

Peter French  
CARDIOLOGIST