

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday March 4, 2013

GOVERNMENT BUNGLES ANOTHER GP AGREEMENT

The State Government will be forced to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars a year more in medical services on Kangaroo Island because of bungled negotiations with its local General Practitioners.

After months of negotiations, Country Health SA has failed to reach a reasonable settlement that would see the existing working GP agreement with the Kangaroo Island's six doctors continue.

Doctors at the Kangaroo Island Medical Clinic say they are not prepared to put the lives of their patients at risk by working dangerously long hours required by the new agreement.

Dr Mark Raines says doctors simply want a continuation of the current arrangements, which involves providing 24-hour 7-day a week obstetric and anaesthetic services and round-the-clock emergency services for 40 weeks a year.

For one week a month, Country Health SA provided a locum to staff the Kangaroo Island Hospital emergency roster.

The Country Health SA began providing the locum some years ago in recognition of the local doctor's punishing schedule.

Under the new GP agreement, Country Health SA wants to stop funding the locum service.

Dr Raines says that if local doctors don't agree to fund the locum themselves, the Health Department will stop them treating public patients in the local hospital - and instead employ a new team of doctors.

"There is also the threat of cutting funds to sustain an Anaesthetic and Obstetric on-call services for the Kangaroo Island community and visitors.

"This may mean the end of operations and birthing on Kangaroo Island.

"We're left scratching our heads trying to work out their logic.

"Where are they going to find the extra money and extra doctors to staff the local hospital with a health budget that is already struggling.

"Is this the start of Country Health SA's efforts to remove locum support from other Country Hospitals? Without locum support, it will become more difficult to attract GPs to the bush and sustain the GPs, like us who are already working in the bush.

"Providing new doctors on Kangaroo Island will cost more than providing locum relief once a month," Dr Raines said.

Kangaroo Island has a permanent population of about 4500 people and an annual tourist population of about 190,000 visitors.

"If we are prevented from treating public patients at the local hospital, we hope for the sake of island residents and tourists that the Health Department can find the money and the doctors by March 31 – when the current GP Agreement ends.

"While our clinic has six doctors, there are generally only four of us working at any one time due to commitments elsewhere.

"As dedicated doctors, we simply cannot compromise our standard of care by agreeing to work dangerously long hours without locum respite.

"It is not fair to our local patients and it sends an appalling message to our tourism industry that relies on the tens of thousands of people attracted to this world-class tourist destination every year. " Dr Raines said.

Dr Raines is available for comment on 0419 035 849.

Dr Gerome van der Linden is on 0418896296

After 8.30 am, the Kangaroo Island Medical Clinic is 85532037.