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Second wave eHealth sites welcome but signals a backward shift away from primary health care

Australian General Practice Network [AGPN] Chair, Dr Emil Djakic today welcomed the second wave of Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record lead implementation sites announced by the Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon but questions the focus on the acute sector.

"I congratulate Brisbane South Division of General Practice for its success in this second wave which will build on the progressive work already being implemented and achieved by GP Partners located in Brisbane's north," Dr Djakic said.

"This setting of GP Partners and Brisbane South Division of General Practice, along with the Mater Misericordiae Health Services Brisbane, will create an exceptionally effective eHealth environment that has the potential to serve as a benchmark for future eHealth opportunities," he said.

"The announcement of Brisbane South Division of General Practice as an additional lead implementation site, brings to four the number of General Practice Networks currently participating in the Personally Controlled Electronic Health Records initiative.

"While this is one third of the whole program, AGPN is concerned the latest round represents a step backwards and away from the primary health care sector with a stronger drift towards the acute sector.

"The eHealth agenda has for too long been dominated by a focus on the acute sector when we know the majority of health services are delivered through general practice and the primary health care sector. This focus has in effect undermined the development of a patient-centric, coordinated, cross sector electronic health system.

"To create a patient-centred eHealth system there needs to be a balance between delivering eHealth programs in the primary health care sector and the acute sector, and this latest round indicates that the Federal Government may have lost some of that balance.

"The primary health care sector is integral to the success of the Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record. To provide a patient-centred health care system, these latest lead sites will need to ensure they don't operate in silos and instead, strongly integrate with the primary health care sector and engage with general practitioners.

"In its Federal Budget 2011-2012 submission, AGPN has called for \$60 million over three years to fund a 'change and adoption' program and to build up the eHealth capacity within the Medicare Locals of the future.

"The challenge for the Network, which is evolving to become a network of Medicare Locals, will be to implement this 'change and adoption' program which will be fundamental in breaking down potential silos and ensuring cross-sectoral integration," Dr Djakic said.

Media contact: Karen Warner, AGPN Media Adviser on (02) 6228 0819/0438 179 520