

21 April 2010

Sensible move saves our health care future

The silent victory out of the COAG process is the bringing together of community health centres and primary mental health with general practice and other primary health care, says Australian General Practice Network Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

"This is long overdue and will overcome current gaps and boundary difficulties in providing more integrated, seamless care to consumers," Dr Djakic said.

"While the primary health care sector has not had the headline attention of the hospitals, this is in fact the pillar of the health system where real improvements in our health system can be made, so this represents a major achievement.

"With the Commonwealth taking responsibility for funding and policy for all primary health care, and the establishment of primary health care organisations to take increasing responsibility for ensuring the integration of these services, we will see a more joined-up system which leads to better health outcomes for the community.

"This reform also establishes the basis for better demand management systems, to look after more people in the community, in their own homes, and to reduce avoidable hospital admissions.

"As the gloss on the hospital deal dries slowly, it is time to get on with the real work and reform in Australian health care and that is with prevention, health promotion, chronic disease management through general practice and general practice related services under the newly outlined primary health care organisations.

"Over time we believe that primary health care organisations can take on increasing responsibility and funding for a range of services and programs which in Australia have been traditionally seen as hospital services but which in other countries are now managed more cost effectively, and with better patient outcomes, in the community."

Dr Djakic said the past few weeks listening to Premiers debate alternative models and fight for further funding had been frustrating for clinicians and the community.

"The health system has to change and while it is not going to be an easy road to reform, it is a road worth travelling.

"We know that more people in Australia end up in hospital unnecessarily than in most other OECD countries. We know that there are large numbers of our population who can't access adequate health services. We also know we can do a lot to address these inequalities," Dr Djakic said.

The Federal takeover of all primary health care funding will improve communication and coordination of patient care.

"It is a move that just makes sense. Community health, mental health, child and maternal health are all interconnected with general practice and the care we provide. Bringing these groups together will see clear benefits for patients in access, coordination and healthier people," he said.

"We know that primary health care is the most effective care available and we have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to fix our system. We should embrace that opportunity.

"We are also delighted by the new initiatives in mental health, and are eager to talk with government about the role our network and the future primary health care organisations can play in implementing these

initiatives, as we do see many of them as central to a strong primary mental health care system and therefore central to what we do," said Dr Djakic.

For media interviews contact Communications Officer Ben Graham on: 02 6228 0828/0430 586 022.