

RURAL DOCTORS ASSOCIATION (NSW) INC

Rural Doctors Association of NSW
Media release

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Slashing of joint replacements at Bowral to hurt rural and Sydney patients alike

The Rural Doctors Association of NSW (RDA NSW) is extremely concerned with a plan by the NSW Government's Sydney South West Area Health Service to slash the number of joint replacement operations at Bowral Hospital in the state's Southern Highlands, fearing it could be a veiled attempt to shut down all such operations at Bowral in the future.

This is despite the service being among the best in NSW with regards to lower infection rates, length of stay for patients, greater cost-effectiveness, and the impact that the cut in operations will have on both local and Sydney hospital waiting lists.

"Orthopaedic doctors at Bowral Hospital have been told that their joint replacements were being reduced by half and that the numbers were being capped at 110 per year" RDA NSW Vice President, Dr Tilak Dissanayake, said.

"Given Bowral Hospital has already done 150 joint replacements this year, the Area Health Service's plan is that excess patients will be transferred to already bursting Sydney waiting lists.

"This decision reeks of discrimination against rural patients, not only those in the Southern Highlands but also patients from other areas of country NSW.

"Many patients will now be forced to travel to Sydney to be seen at a clinic at one of the major hospitals, then travel again to have their surgery performed, and then again for post-op visits. Patients' families will also be forced to travel to Sydney to visit them.

"Of most concern is the fact that there has been no rationale given for the decision. No money will be saved. In fact, we believe this decision will increase the overall cost of these joint replacements both for the NSW Government and for the patients themselves.

"It seems incredible that the Area Health Service would slash the number of joint replacement operations at Bowral Hospital at a time when all Area Health Services have been directed to reduce waiting lists to zero by 30 June!

"Bowral Hospital has skilled orthopaedic surgeons, anaesthetists and operating room staff who can provide all of the required joint replacements. Reduction of this surgery will ultimately result in reduced access to emergency and trauma services as well.

"This type of short-sighted approach can only mean less funding and fewer services for rural hospitals like Bowral, and longer waiting lists for joint replacements in Sydney! Consequently, it is not in the interest of rural patients, the local community or indeed Sydney patients to slash the joint replacement service at Bowral Hospital.

"Bowral Hospital's Medical Staff Council will be fighting the Area Health Service's decision to cut joint replacement surgery at Bowral. RDA NSW joins the Council in strongly condemning the decision and calls on the Area Health Service and NSW Health Minister to reverse this short-sighted decision urgently."

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