

Doctors deliver pay threat

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SPECIALIST doctors have warned they will walk out on Tasmania's public health system without a boost to their pay.

"This is about trying to maintain safe staffing levels in the public health system," Royal Hobart Hospital endocrinologist Tim Greenaway said.

"We are by far the worst-paid specialist group in the country."

While a first-year, level-one salaried specialist in Tasmania's public hospitals would get about \$110,000, they would earn about \$197,000 in Queensland, Dr Greenaway said.

Tasmania's closest rival, the Northern Territory, offered about \$128,000.

"We're obviously not going to get anything like the Queensland and West Australian awards, we're aware of the financial constraints of the Government," Dr Greenaway said.

He would not say how much the Australian Medical Association was calling for, but said the problem was the Government's apparent refusal to negotiate.

"They won't even talk to us," he said.

"They obviously want us to go away, and unfortunately that's what we're going to do."

The existing three-year agreement would expire on June 30.

"We had a nexus agreement implemented with the last award but that's been broken by the Government and all other states have had substantial increments," he said.

Dr Greenaway said doctors, including specialists like himself, were already looking elsewhere.

"I've been asked to be a referee to a whole stack of bright young doctors who are leaving," he said.

"It may be that they want overseas-trained doctors to run the hospitals and if that's the case they should at least be honest."

Dr Greenaway said the Government should invest in maintaining salaried staff rather than using taxpayers' money to hire locums to "prop up" the health system.

Doctors were even less likely to accept a pay cut and move to, or stay in, Tasmania now that plans for a new RHH had been scrapped.

Health Minister Lara Giddings denied the Government would not talk to doctors.

"The Government is absolutely committed to negotiating a new agreement with our doctors that recognises and rewards their expertise and work, and we will negotiate in good faith," Ms Giddings said.