



MEDIA RELEASE – 6th April 2009

GP Assist – State & Federal governments to abandon rural doctors

The Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Medical Association calls on Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon and State Health Minister Lara Giddings to reverse their recent decision and keep the general practitioner after-hours support *GP Assist* model fully-operational, retaining current funding and local operating arrangements.

*GP Assist*¹ is a private sector organisation now established in Tasmania for ten years currently owned and operated by *Clinical Solutions*². It provides an after-hours nurse-based system of patient triage with general practitioner supervision State-wide via a dedicated call-centre located in Hobart. The State & Federal governments have recently agreed to remove the local nurse-triage component and outsource it to a Federal government ‘health-line’³ to be located on mainland Australia. The current *GP Assist* arrangements are due to finish in June 2010.

Speaking in Launceston the President of AMA Tasmania, Dr. Chris Middleton, called for the Ministers to reconsider and quickly reverse their decision.

“*GP Assist* has established itself as the premier after-hours support service in Tasmania and is now used by 90% of GPs”, said Dr. Middleton. “It is also very popular with patients as they know that they probably won’t have to get their GP out of bed at night if they talk with *GP Assist*. It is claimed and it makes sense that it can result in a reduction of up to 80% of after-hours call-outs for our hard-working Tasmanian country doctors,” he said.

“The effective dismantling of this now well established service will undermine the ability of these GPs to work effectively and worse will make it much more difficult to recruit and retain doctors in the bush. The health ministers have combined to abandon rural doctors in Tasmania.”

Dr. Middleton said that dismantling the vital Hobart nurse-triage component of the service and sending it off-shore from Tasmania will diminish this important service that has become part of the Tasmanian health landscape.

“The federal government’s health-line is not the same as *GP Assist*’s vital service and the two should not be confused,” he said. “The community is starting to get sick and tired of off-shore call centres whose operators don’t have a clue about local conditions and contacts, and this is particularly important in relation to urgent after-hours personal health needs.”

Further information: Dr. Chris Middleton Mb 0408 130 449 Launceston

¹ <http://www.gpat.com.au/>

² <http://www.csdss.com/index.aspx>

³ National Health Call Centre – commencing April 2009 <http://tinyurl.com/chltp>