

Submission
No 201

INQUIRY INTO DENTAL SERVICES IN NSW

Organisation: Westmead Centre for Oral Health

Name: Dr Stephen Cox

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Theme:

Summary



The University of Sydney
Faculty of Dentistry

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June 23, 2005

The Standing Committee On Social Issues
Legislative Council, NSW Parliament
Macquarie St, NSW 2000

RE: The Inquiry By The Standing Committee On Social Issues Into
Dental Health

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a citizen of NSW, a specialist Oral Surgeon, and a member of the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Sydney. As such I have long been concerned about the degrading state of dental health, service and education, and welcome the Upper House Inquiry into this neglected area of health care.

As a specialist Oral Surgeon, I am constantly reminded of the many people who people who suffer significant pain and disability from poor dental health. I am a VMO for Gosford District Hospital, at present the waiting list for my public cases is two (2) years. I am dismayed by the lack of adequate services across the state to relieve their pain and restore their lives to normal function. My 'waiting list' is not unique, and similar waiting times exist across the State, if the services are indeed offered. Many people come to Sydney for oral health services

It is particularly worrying to me that there is an increase in the extent of untreated dental disease which does not seem to be acknowledged by State Health, This situation has been worsening over the last 10 years and yet State Health has failed to respond to the need. This situation will not improve as we approach the time when the 'baby boomers', who make up a significant proportion of the dental workforce, start retiring.

I first joined Westmead Hospital in 1998, at which time we were informed that the number of training positions would be reduced, and resources restricted. At that time I wrote to the hospital, the university and the professional bodies, all of which agreed with the tenant of my statement that public health services were in a desperate situation within NSW, and needed to be rectified to be able to fulfil our fiduciary responsibilities to the people of this State. However, the facilities and resources for the training of oral health personnel continue to diminish. Oral health educational staff, at the universities and 'teaching hospitals', work under difficult circumstances and with ever increasing workloads. The number of staff willing to work under these conditions is becoming fewer and fewer. These staff are not

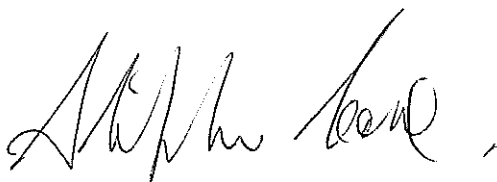
being replaced. This situation would suggest there is no planning and prioritizing for the future needs of the State.

Oral health services in the Public Health Sector are generally poorly supported in both urban and rural communities. There is almost a complete lack of specialist oral health services west of the 'Great Dividing Range'. Even within the Private Health Sector the waiting time for routine dental services is generally many months. This all suggests a significant manpower shortage and a lack of planning.

I hope that the current inquiry results in positive action being taken to address these concerns. Meetings and enquiries have taken place in the past with no obvious oral health benefit for the people of NSW, rural or urban.

I hope that the present inquiry is able to respond to the very significant oral health needs of our community, and hence fulfil the duties entrusted to the State to ensure that all citizens have adequate and appropriate health care. Oral health care that is both adequate and appropriate for the present as well as the future demands an immediate response. It requires planning, education and training, resources for our hospitals and rural and urban clinics, incentive programs for our rural areas, and support from specialty services. It also requires a commitment to ongoing and adequate support from the State into the future.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Stephen King", followed by a comma.