

Submission
No 95

INQUIRY INTO DENTAL SERVICES IN NSW

Organisation:

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Telephone:

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Theme:

Summary

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Attn: The Committee Chair
Jan Burnswood MLC

Thank you for the opportunity to express some relevant points that we believe are significant to dental services throughout country NSW.

This submission is presented on behalf of Bruce Halliday, (former Chairperson of the Broken Hill Mines Dental Clinic and inaugural Acting CEO of the Barrier Dental Clinic incorporated) and Norman Dunlevy (former Chairperson of the Broken Hill Town Dental Clinic and inaugural Chairperson of the Barrier Dental Clinic). Neither of the above persons are currently involved in the Barrier Dental Clinic.

The citizens of Broken Hill and surrounding districts have been extremely well provided for with dental services since the formation of the Mines' Dental Clinic in 1948 and the Town Dental Clinic in 1967. However, over the past five years, it has become extremely difficult to obtain the required number of dentists to service the needs of the community.

Funding has never been the main issue in the inability to attract dentists to this region but rather, the failure of the NSW Dental Board to encourage dentists to leave the city areas and the apparent lack of understanding of dental procedures by management of NSW Health.

The Barrier Dental Clinic still has, to our knowledge, approximately \$800,000 in ready cash but is unable to attract the services of qualified dentists to the area even though they were offering salaries far in excess of anything offered on the coast of NSW plus the provision of rent free accommodation and travel assistance. Even to the extent where people were being flown back to the nearest capital city of Adelaide on a fortnightly basis.

The NSW Health computer system was designed for use in public hospitals and, as instructed by NSW Health, providers were encouraged to misrepresent units of treatment to validate the services provided and to meet budget criteria.

Even when used, as instructed by NSW Health, invariably this system does not allow treatment even though the patient may be screaming in pain, as "pain in itself does not qualify a person for treatment" (as per quote from NSW Health).

One of the main problems encountered by the clinics in Broken Hill has been that public patients, either by their own doing, or the unavailability of dental practitioners, have never had some of their work procedures completed and this, together with their lack of dental hygiene, has been a major deterrent in securing professional dentists to public dentistry.

The practice whereby dental practitioners, before commencing treatment, had to get permission from persons stationed at an obscure base (e.g. Dubbo), is a deplorable situation as our experience has shown that people do not present for urgent dental treatment unless they have a genuine problem.

If NSW Health is going to continue to manage the public dentistry, it is to be hoped that appropriate personnel with dental qualifications rather than administrative or medical qualifications are appointed and adequate funding be made available.

Over the years, the dental clinics in Broken Hill have encouraged the universities of NSW to send final year dental students to Broken Hill for practical experience and, in the main, this has been successful. However, despite numerous people being given the opportunity of employment in Broken Hill, these offers have always been declined, and if NSW Health thinks that they will change this culture, then we believe that they may be very disappointed.

These are just a few examples of issues we encountered during our time at the clinics in Broken Hill. Should any member of the inquiry wish to speak to either Norm Dunley or Bruce Halliday there would be no problem.

This submission is sent with the best interests of the citizens of Broken Hill and surrounding districts who, we believe, deserve a much better service than is currently being provided.

BRUCE HALLIDAY

NORM DUNLEVY