

**INQUIRY INTO OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF  
THE NORTHERN BEACHES HOSPITAL**

**Name:** Dr Suzanne Daly

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Partially  
Confidential

I have been and still am a GP on the Northern Beaches of Sydney for 40 years .9 years in Dee Why, 20 years in Avalon and now 11 years in Newport so I have patients from all over the district. Ever since the Northern Beaches hospital opened in Frenchs Forest 2018 I have seen widespread distress and confusion being reported by patients and their families and friends. We read daily of mistakes being made at the new hospital and the public has become disillusioned with the current health services and the situation is a debacle After waiting for years for new and better services We find ourselves with less.

I was on the board of the Manly Warringah division of GP's for many years and so it was as a representative GP's that I was invited to attend the planning meeting for The New Northern Beaches Hospital in March 2012. The night before I received the outline for the meeting by email- the hospital was already largely planned I was dismayed that the site for the new hospital was to be at Frenchs Forest which was the last of three possible choices for the site when the only public survey I saw back in 2006 had put these 3 choices up but no public discussion had been held and we thought the issue was not resolvedresolved the issue.This followed on from the original senate(2004-2006) inquiry into the poor health services in our district This inquiry recommended Mona Vale Hospital have it's intensive-care unit back. Our local member at the time had insisted that removing intensive care from the Mona Vale Hospital was" declaring war on the people of Pittwater".

I was not surprised because the main push for a rebuild of Manly Hospital at Frenchs Forest had come from specialists at Manly

I was shocked' to see that there was to be a sale of the Manly hospital site to private developers. The local member Mike Baird had been maintaining that the site would stay in public hands and be for community purposes in all previous meetings. I had attended. Well we know what happened to him. The Mona Vale Hospital site was also to be reconfigured with only outpatient no inpatient services yet at that time our local member Rob Stokes was maintaining that the hospital would continue and that maternity was to return .He and Jillian Skinner the health minister had stood outside the hospital during the election a few months before promising that Mona Vale Hospital would continue if they were elected. tlThe liberals had done a 180 degree turn on their 16 year policy that had opposed the one hospital as a rebuild of Manly Hospital in the future I felt betrayed confused as we were expecting public birthing services back at Mona Vale in the near future .Also rotary was raising money for a promised inpatient palliative care .I contactedMr Rob Stokes then with the results of this .meeting He insisted they had gotten it wrong.He then obfuscated the situation saying it was not the true plan and that he was saving the hospital but in fact he was just saving the site and he subsequently revealed that he knew the building was to be demolished down the track and that the 1.2 million dollar refurbishment of the obstetric unit for just a few years was unfortunately to be a waste of taxpayer.s moneyas the building was to be demolished when the new hospital was built.

These plans were subsequently removed from the public view and he put out the idea that I was circulating rumours and that I was interfering in his efforts to save the hospital !So I met some opposition from hospital groups when I took up a petition He did not have it in his office or promote it in anyway. Never the less with enthusiastic helpers I soon collected in person nearly 12 thousand signatures in a few months Believing time to be running out to prevent these changes at Mona Vale Hospital I saw Mr. Stokes in September 2012. He said he would not be able have the petition heard in the current setting of parliament and any how it would be better

left till the next sitting after Christmas to allow time for his colleagues to digest It was not tabled till May 20013. Only 5 members of parliament bothered to show up. The public gallery was full of concerned residents It was not read out it was just tabled Mr. Stokes did not discuss the issues instead he spent the time outlining his plans for the reconfiguration of services at the Mona Vale Hospital site.. I subsequently received a letter from Jillian Skinner outlining her plans for the same plans for the site so the voices of 12000 people on the Northern Beaches had not been heard, their wishes and needs were not considered as no public discussion was embarked on.!

The population has greatly increased since the first proposal for the one public hospital was put by Labor in 2002 and vigorously opposed by the liberals for the next 10 years. The reasons for their opposition to the solution valid in 2002 are still valid today. More people now need more hospitals and Medical Services not less.. How could one expect 1 emergency department at Northern Beaches Hospital to cope with increasing patient attendances when the health departments closed two. Those departments had been seeing more and more people over the years and were servicing 35000 each in the year before closing. Also the new hospital emergency department was expected to handle more attendances from people in the local area and that was expected to take the pressure off the Royal North Shore Public Hospital emergency department . I doubt that that has happened. Both Mona Vale and Manly Hospital emergency departments have received certificates of efficiency but we are not able to view statistics from the Northern Beaches Hospital as it is not under the control of the health department so we can only go on word-of-mouth reports back to me and colleagues and they are NOT GOOD .

I am very concerned for the wellbeing of the people of the Northern Beaches especially Pittwater and especially those north of the Bends who are seriously at risk in emergency because of their distance from the new hospital .We used to worry about flooding on the Park way causing delays but they are happening just with traffic congestion .An accident on any of the feeder roads can cause chaos. There is widespread confusion and distress as the new hospital has been reported widely in the media as having lots of problems These came rapidly to the fore after the opening Just "teething" problems according to the health minister Mr Brad Hazzard (a lawyer not a doctor) however numerous clinicians and nursing staff who work there say that the problems are more serious and ongoing and senior staff have resigned and junior staff would also if not so dedicated to their patients and bound by contracts. Staff fear retribution if they speak out in public in person

This is all due to poor planning and execution. One would not accept teething problems in a new jumbo jet.It is totally inexcusable in a supposedly state-of-the-art facility years in the planning. The building was rushed at the end and rumour has it that the builders would get a bonus when if it opened on the due date However it opened with dire deficiencies , even the memorial plaque fell off the wall at the opening ceremony! Deficiencies quickly came to light as very senior management then medical clerical and nursing staff started to resign .I.T systems were incompatible with both Manly and Mona Vale hospitals and resulted in no previous outpatient appointments being available. The public was distressed and angry ! My patient working in the outpatient department was so stressed she begged to be moved to another department !Medication information was lost along with patient inpatient histories from both hospitals.Discharge summaries have been and still are! They were either not done delayed and even sent to the wrong GP all resulting in poor ongoing care of patients in out patient clinics and with their local GP On discharge reports of pathology radiology operations biopsies etc were either not done lost or even wrong -all inexcusable in a supposedly state-of-the-art facility..Some inpatient clinics are

no longer operating and patients have been directed to the Royal North Shore Hospital Yet one of the drivers for the hospital being at French Forest and not on the true Northern Beaches was that this hospital would take the pressure off the Royal North Shore Hospital, How ironic ! Private hospitals cannot provide the career pathways for doctors or nurses and that is why the Northern Beaches hospital is having trouble recruiting staff especially nurses They are mostly agency nurses who do their "best filling" in but are not familiar with the equipment the layout or procedures and mistakes are being made and this is putting even more pressure on the full-time staff under contracts to work there. These contracts with both medical and management people have caused a lot of angst and many senior clinicians have found them unfair and refused to work under them

.Private hospitals have their own expertise but they do not have the same culture as public hospitals especially in an emergency department where quick triage is essential and time is of the essence and it should not be wasted with the patient status needing to be ascertained. Both public and private patients have reported delays in their treatment due to this need and see it as compromising their subsequent care. Many patients report being pressured to go private for 'best care' especially inpatient care. Profit should not determine appropriate medical care and appropriate investigations should be done if and when needed .Private hospitals are used to planned elective treatments especially surgery and are good at that. Emergency departments can be likened to war zones I know as I once worked in Prince of Wales and other suburban hospital A and E years ago when I was an intern and we can still get sudden emergencies in general practice so I understand the pressures.

The chronic shortage of staff is putting extra pressure in all departments on the fulltime nurses and doctors and the dedicated junior doctors should have their concerns addressed This model of public private partnership was tried and failed in the past at Port Macquarie and the hospital had to be bought back from the private operator at great cost to the taxpayer. Does the same fate await the Northern Beaches Hospital.

The road works that were NOT PLANNED NOR COSTED before the hospital commenced and already have cost the taxpayer far more than budgeted for !. They are also still not finished!

When the Northern Beaches hospital opened there was widespread confusion over just what the Urgent Care Centre at Mona Vale Hospital could provide and reports quickly emerged of a lack of even basic equipment such as ultrasounds medical supplies such as antitoxins and antivenemes and basic drugs and dressings. There even had to be public demonstrations outside the Parliament House and Brad Hazzards office to get these essential services there. Mr Hazzard appeared not to know what was where and also the plans for the Mona Vale Hospital because he maintained it was not being demolished. Yet this is happening as we speak. The public rapidly lost trust and became distressed .Patients suffered more not knowing where to go fearing their problems are life-threatening especially after hours when anxiety makes things appear worse. They would, as I do, expect that the equipment and expertise to prevent impending death are available at the Urgent Care Centre! It also appeared that all these services were not available through the new emergency department at the Northern Beaches Hospital as reports came out about coronary angiograms only being available to public patients Monday to Friday 9 to 4. Mr Tony Abbott boasted that it was only due to his efforts that a public MRI machine was installed there If this is true it is a disgrace !Patients needing urgent treatment are requested to call an ambulance when it is needed but have no choice as a public patient as to where they go even though they have to pay!. There is confusion as to what constitutes major trauma that has to go straight to RNSH. Many do not want to go to the new Northern Hospital

and are bypassing it and going direct to the Royal North Shore Hospital or the San. Some of these patients are driving themselves which is placing them at increased risk and also extra pressure on the Royal North Shore Hospital. Ambulance officers have expressed concerns to me over their services but are too fearful to publicly voice their concerns personally for fear of retribution but have since told me about delays in attending to patients when called out because not enough manned vehicles are in the area sometimes. They can find themselves in conflict with patients over where they have to go and are distressed that there are incompatibilities with other emergency departments and also delays when off loading the patients at the emergency at Northern Beaches Hospital.

My local Member often stated that there is a high level of insurance cover on the Northern Beaches quoting 60% private but that means that 40% are public - are they not important? Surely their needs need to be met! Our area has one of the highest greater than 55 demographic and this is increasing with new developments announced all the time. This group has the highest risk of stroke and heart attack. This group contains a lot of self-funded retirees and pensioners who are also often not privately insured so they need access to 24/7 full cardiac assessment and treatment as close as possible to their homes. Also this group has the highest incidence of stroke and so needs full investigation and treatment to be available in the new hospital.

Also this area has one of the highest Primary School enrolments in the state. It constitutes the next biggest demographic in the area. We are now told that public health policy is that children under 12 be operated at a special public paediatric hospital but many private hospitals and day surgery centres are operating on children (successfully of course). I suspect that this policy is maybe to promote the vested interests of clinicians who are working within those hospitals and not necessarily in the best interests of the patients or their families. A turf war is reported to be happening between Prince of Wales Randwick and Westmead cardiac units.

Many children's fractures need operation but who can say without x-rays first so where do parents take children with sporting injuries on weekends?! Parents are stressed going from hospital to hospital looking for a bed in urgent cases and this is placing a terrible burden on families especially with both parents working as is common in this area due to high mortgages. The children's hospitals are too far away and too busy as it is. We need more public paediatric services in our area not less.

We need a public birthing unit to be back at Mona Vale Hospital. Frenchs Forest is just too far with rapid labour or obstructive labour and again is placing a burden on families having to go to F.F.

We need blood and a blood bank for transfusions. These are essential for an urgent care centre back at the Mona Vale site. There are many instances where lives have been saved by this at Mona Vale in the past. Shock occurs quickly and can be fatal and needs treatment urgently - patients just need stabilization first and can then be transferred to the appropriate specialist centre later. This is how even major trauma such as in warzone is handled best.

We need more public day surgery centres not private ones. Know of no waiting lists for private colonoscopies but people can wait months for public ones. This could prove fatal.

In summary the Northern Beaches hospital is the wrong hospital in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was built by vested interest for vested interests based on old statistics that are not current today. It is not meeting the needs of the people of the Northern Beaches. It can now be seen for what it really is - just a catalyst and Trojan horse for the over development of Frenchs Forest for real estate agents and developers. Brad Hazzard has already called for rezoning and increased density of dwellings in the area surrounding the Northern Beaches Hospital. This will

result in the over development of Frenchs Forest and also will result in more demands on this failing hospital. Megacities all over the world are failing people because they are heat sinks, they cause pollution, distress with traffic congestion .lack of green space and pressure from too many demands on public services and are especially causing more mental health problems

.I have put in a submission to ICAC over the vested interest served by this plan.

So here we have politicians with no medical expertise making decisions about medical and health services The public has never been made aware of details of the contract of the health department with healthscope nor of the final fate of the Manly and Mona Vale Hospital sites This hospital at Frenchs Forest is at the wrong time !Other public hospitals that were proposed to be redeveloped with this public/private model are now being upgraded by the health department. publicly as the public private partnership model has failed to deliver better or cheaper There are many examples of a level 3 hospitals being renovated and even upgraded while still in operation the health department knows it could rebuild Mona Vale hospital.

In December 2018 concerned about the distress I was seeing in families I ,along with Dr Jonathan King. had an interview with Deb Cox ( C.E.O of the Northern Sydney Health district) and put in a written submission outlying the need for Mona Vale hospital to be returned as a level3 hospital She appeared empathetic but told us "It will take a whole of cabinet decision to overturn current plans for the redevelopment of the Mona Vale Hospital site"

So politicians determining plans for sites and overlooking the needs of the community.

I believe the Health department could really take the pressure off RNSH now by returning acute services with proper emergency. Intensive care. basic surgery.obstetric and paediatric services back to an upgraded Mona Vale Hospital. This could take the pressure off the NBH allowing it to better service its own catchment area. It could then focus on upgrading its cardiac services and also have a stroke unit and be a specialist referral service for other hospitals

The one hospital at Frenchs Forest is twenty years too late and is already unable to cope let alone in the future. It is simply the wrong hospital in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Kind regards,  
Suzanne.