

Submission  
No 306

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH OUTCOMES AND ACCESS TO  
HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES IN RURAL,  
REGIONAL AND REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Name:** Name suppressed  
**Date Received:** 13 December 2020

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Partially  
Confidential

Tenterfield is a rural town situated on the New England Highway 10-15 minutes from the Queensland border with a population of approximately 4,000 and servicing the shire area of approximately 7,500.

When Tenterfield was under the New England Health Region all the patients were transferred to Lismore, Toowoomba & Brisbane, since amalgamating it with the Hunter Area to form the Hunter New England Area Health the patients are now transferred to Armidale, Tamworth or Newcastle.

Since being in the Hunter New England Area Health Service the travel times for patients and families have increased. Previously the travel times were 2 hours to go to Lismore or Toowoomba and 3 ½ hours to Brisbane. Now the travel times are 2 ¼ hours to Armidale, 3 ½ hours to Tamworth and 6 ½ or 7 hours to Newcastle.

The nursing staff at Tenterfield Hospital has to fight to try and get patients transferred to Toowoomba or Lismore which are closer for Tenterfield patients. This means that sometimes they can be on the phone for hours with the Ambulance Dubbo coordination centre trying to achieve this, only to be told in the finish that the patient will be transferred to Armidale. The Ambulance coordination centre have at times even over ruled the treating doctor at the hospital.

An example of this: A patient was transported to the Tenterfield Hospital with a CVA:

The treating doctor had examined the patient and contacted a specialist in Toowoomba and arranged for the patient to be transferred to the Toowoomba Hospital and the Hospital had confirmed that a bed was available; the Ambulance coordination centre overrode the treating doctor stating that Toowoomba was not going to be an option. Some 4-5 hours later the ambulance coordination centre agreed to transport the patients to Lismore which is the same traveling time as it is to Toowoomba.

The best outcome for this patient did not happen because of the delay in getting them to the most appropriate treatment.

Another case was a patient presented to the local hospital with Chest Pain. He was examined and arrangements were made for him to be transferred to the John Flynn Hospital for further treatment where a doctor had accepted him. The patient was told that he would be transferred to Tamworth. Some 5 hours later he was transported by road ambulance to Glen Innes airport and flown by air ambulance to Tamworth. The next day the patient was discharged and on his return to Tenterfield he visited his G.P., and was sent to Toowoomba for a scan and then had to have a stent put in after being discharged from Tamworth Hospital with no treatment.

Another Cardiac case presented to Tenterfield Hospital and asked to be transferred to the Toowoomba hospital for further treatment because they had family there, only to be later

transferred by road ambulance to Glen Innes, then flown to Dubbo, then transferred by road ambulance to the Orange Hospital then later transferred to a Sydney Hospital. This put the patient in dire circumstances with his family not knowing at the time where their family member was being treated.

The above complaints plus many more have been sent to our local Member Janelle Saffin who has acted on them to try and resolve the issues we have here in Tenterfield with the Health System.

The transfer expenses for Hunter New England Health must be exorbitant because they just don't transfer patients to the closest appropriate hospital. All the residents are told that Armidale is our referral centre and that's where Tenterfield patients will be sent. However the patients could quite possibly then be transferred to Tamworth or John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle. We are told that it is NSW health dollars and it has to be spent in NSW, this information came from the Health Service Manager in Tenterfield. We have much better outcomes for emergency patients because they can be retrieved by the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service and flown to the most appropriate facility for their medical problem.

There are issues that I would like clarified during this inquiry:

1. Why is it that Lismore's Tertiary referral centre is the Gold Coast University Hospital or Brisbane in Queensland when they are in NSW but Tenterfield's Tertiary Hospital is John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle some seven hours away when our town is located only 10-15 minutes from the Queensland border? It just doesn't make any sense. Geographically, location must come into consideration. We already have a cross-border agreement in place with Stanthorpe Hospital in Queensland for Maternity patients.
2. Why are Lismore/Tweed Heads ambulances allowed to cross the border with patients and Tenterfield is not?
3. Why are Hospital Protocols and Ambulance Protocols different when it comes to Hospital transfers?
4. How is it that Dubbo Ambulance Coordination Centre can override a medical practitioner when they request to transfer a patient to a hospital in Queensland which is closer and much better for their patient?
5. Tenterfield had a patient transfer vehicle stationed here but it was taken to Glen Innes. So does this also contribute to the problems we have here when transferring patients.

For your information the following are the travel times from Tenterfield to:

Armidale 2 ¼ hours – 189klms

Lismore 2 hours - 160klms

Toowoomba Qld 2 hours - 200klms

Brisbane 3 ¼ hours – 275klms

John Hunter Hospital Newcastle – 6 ½ - 7 hours – 575klms

Flying time for the Westpac Rescue Helicopter from Tenterfield to Lismore is approx. 25 minutes.