

RURAL DOCTORS ASSOCIATION (NSW) INC

Media release – 15 January 2010

Health bureaucrats continue to bungle

RDA NSW President Ian Kamerman has called on the North Coast Area Health Service (NCAHS) to stop blaming problems at Bellingen Hospital on rural doctors and rural communities, who are trying to fix the problems.

Dr Kamerman made the comments following an article in the *The Coffs Coast Advocate*, 12 January 2010, where an unnamed NCAHS spokesman blamed local doctors for "miscategorising patients" leading to statistical errors and presumably poor decisions about the future of Bellingen Hospital.

"Obviously the unnamed spokesman is unaware that Area Health Services devotes significant resources to employ Patient Record Management Staff whose role it is to categorise patient stays," Dr Kamerman said.

"This is not and never has been a role for medical staff whose responsibility it is to provide quality clinical care, including medical treatment and diagnosis. It is a clerical task to translate a diagnosis into statistical categories."

The community of Bellingen on the NSW North Coast is fighting for the survival of its much needed local hospital, and RDA NSW believes the community deserves a health service that caters for its needs.

"The community of Bellingen has waited 18 months for the Area Health Chief Executive to fund the Bellingen model of obstetric care. The model is so successful it's being introduced into other communities, but has still not been started up in its home town," Dr Kamerman said.

"The flawed NCAHS report into Bellingen Hospital accused local doctors of having their patients in hospital much longer than is standard. What the report didn't take into account is the fact that this is largely due to Bellingen Hospital's role in looking after coastal residents requiring aged care placements or rehabilitation – obviously care that can involve lengthy stays - and that there are no local health facilities which can accommodate these patients outside the hospital.

"Furthermore, due to the parlous state of community health in Bellingen local patients have to stay in hospital longer as community staff do not exist in numbers to provide the required level of care.

"RDA NSW looks forward to working constructively with the North Coast Area Health Service in improving health services to its rural communities. This can only be achieved if the same view is shared by local health bureaucrats," Dr Kamerman said.

Available for interview: RDA NSW President Dr Ian Kamerman on 0488 732 679

Media contact: Lara Cole on 0421 202 643