



Dear Mayor,

I enclose a copy of a document which will circulate with Dunedin Diary 27.1.21. Further, a copy of a similar document in same issue dated 28.08.19.

I invite your attention to the documents. It is a serious matter on a broad basis. Much concern exists here. I was recently approached by a local business person who claims to have spoken with you & perhaps obtain your support and the arranging of a local public forum. I am also writing to the local Member, Roy Butler.

I would be pleased to meet and discuss at some future time. I will basically be absent Dunedin for medical purposes during February. Not prior to then however. This community & now certainly Cochrane are calling out for help. I often speak with my DR. here at length. She is fighting the good fight but now must take maternity leave in some 3 months. So the problem gathers, In anticipation, Warren Bull,

20 Tucklan St  
Dunedin. 2844  
05.01.2021.

Dear Editor,

Re: Medical practitioners availability in  
Rural / Regional locations.

On 28th August 2019, I wrote  
regarding the Doctor crisis in Dunedin.

Today I do so on a more general  
broad basis. At that time I made  
pointed comment respecting the  
performance of some, a reflection of my  
then frustration. I know the issues are  
large and challenging. I will be more  
circumspect.

It is not that the situation has  
improved. Arguably it is worse and  
even more so with our neighbours at  
Coolah who this week have gone from  
three physicians ~~to~~ in recent months  
to none in place. They afforded some  
relief for Dunedin patients last year  
during the dark days here. How might  
the community of Coolah now be  
serviced?

Real and genuine concern exists in Dunedin respecting the overall adequacy of G. P. service.

It is not the quality of service which is in question, in fact it is excellent and follows through the system to Hospital staff and ancillary and allied health workers. You can only play with the cards dealt.

It would seem that most recently one of our incumbent G. P.'s has decided not to take 'new' patients. That stance is clearly proper as it was found that patients could not get an appointment within a reasonable period causing dismay. The defracting feature is that clearly demand exceeds provision, some will miss out and struggle to press a button and obtain a G. P. Surely that is a measure of the dearth of medical availability.

So, if the widely held view that a need, a genuine need exists for greater G. P. 'hands on' availability, we must do something to address it. It is a problem which is real and will not go away. As a community we must support any measures to ~~to~~ improve what we have.

I feel those measures must be initiated externally, that is to say outside Dunedoo, but with our support.

So, who to call on? Ideally at local Government level within the Warrumbungle Shire Council. Not however by the bureaucrats within the Council at Conabarabran. Rather, by the Mayor and the elected Councillors. It is they who should have voice, speak to the issues, seek to improve what exists. It should be supported by Mr. Butler, M.L.A. Member for BARWON, a massive electorate but one who lives almost locally. A community consultative forum must be called. I would request the community to attend and support such a forum. It is important that emphasis is placed on the issues as being say "universal" in rural areas and not just a local one. Clearly, a broad vision seeking the support of State Government is crucial.

Now to the remedy. How do we "fix it"? I have long held the view that the Doctor crisis in which so many small, remote and disadvantaged centres experience problems is principally a monetary consideration. Let's face it, money is paramount. Other factors exist.

They are isolation, perhaps non-familiarity with country life, family issues such as a partner who may be a professional, children and their education and perhaps the challenge of, in some cases practising alone. They are all considerations and give rise to why country centres feel cheated and denied.

If the real issue is money why not ensure they get it. The inducement has to be considerable. Say seek to gather and relocate fifty D.R.'s. Pay them \$600,000 P.A. established walk-in surgery, Insurance carried by the Government and free accommodation which is normally available. Ensure a period of three years contract so as to ensure continuity and the establishment of Doctor / Patient connection and relationship.

Ad-hoc "Drop in" Locums DO NOT WORK.

The cost of my proposal is but \$90 million over three years. N.S.W. is the largest, most productive State in the NATION. By their own account the Government boasts of this State being the powerhouse economy of the NATION. It should be remembered that recently a report stated the Government received some \$44 million

for 12 months of Parking fees collected from the major hospitals of Sydney.

Finally, another contribution to the solution. That is Separation, dissection of the Health portfolio. Without doubt the largest budgetary area in the most crucial role. It is rapidly becoming unmanageable. Covid-19 has placed further restraints and demands. It is a confronting portfolio. My suggestion is not a criticism or reflection of the role played by MR. HAZZARD which has been admirable.

Rather, it is intended to alleviate his responsibility whilst "cutting the cloth" to ensure greater community familiarity with country areas. Not unlike the Department of Primary Industry which became the only portfolio to be relocated to Orange about 1996. That has been a great success.

That a Junior Ministerial Health portfolio be created (Country/Rural/Regional) and located at TAMWORTH, Dubbo or Orange. Further, it would be necessary to create boundaries either

- (a) The Great Dividing Range West thereof
- (b) Exclude Greater Sydney, Newcastle,

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Central Coast, Blue Mountains and Illawarra.

Big is not best. Dedication and commitment to a much less populous area all with a common problem and thread is ideal.

In conclusion, all the while our right to have access to a skilled practitioner is being challenged and maybe torn down and denied. Yet we live in a smart, wealthy country supported by wonderful advanced services lacking only in the most material contributor. Can you assist in providing a solution to the issues?

WARREN BULL  
Dunedoo.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Copies.

- (1) Mayor, Warrumbungle Shire Council.
- (2) Mr. R. Butler, M.L.A. Member for Barren

Original to Outback Press, Coolah  
for publication in Dunedoo Diary.  
Further Coolah Diary if desired.

# Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

## DOCTOR CRISIS DUNEDOO

I write respecting the critical and widely held concerns at Dunedoo regarding the failure of the Health System to ensure an appropriate and assured availability of Medical Practitioners here.

Those concerns arose and have been held for some months. The situation has worsened. It would not appear the concerns are being addressed or reversed. Community concerns and lack of confidence in the failed system has never been higher and is quite shameful.

It is proper to first look at the recent events and history of GP's here.

Dr Hopwood provided stability and assurance to his patients for some 24 years from his Digilah Street surgery.

Meantime, the then incumbent GP in situ with Western Health practised from and serviced the Multipurpose Service (Hospital). Some three years past that arrangements were terminated. Western Health in a blaze of publicity and good intent told us all that Centre would continue to be serviced on a permanent ongoing basis, therefore at that time allaying the concerns of this community. History has shown this has not occurred. It was originally intended and indeed evolved that a Locum GP would service the Centre for varying periods determined by availability and willingness. Not surprisingly that undertaking has broken down in recent times to the degree it is non-existent and consider if you will the additional demands and stress it surely places on an otherwise most competent nursing staff. It is not right or proper for staff to be regularly exposed in the absence of a GP. In my view the catalyst of our problems is in the failure of Western Health to maintain a GP at the MPS. The system is dysfunctional and a "Mish Mash" of GP's.

It fails to establish a relationship and liaison which brings assurance and increased familiarity providing a fundamental right and expectation to have access to a GP.

What we have is mediocrity. It has become the accepted norm. The problem you walk past is the one which remains. Our community can get what they seek through endeavour and motivation. We must not accept mediocrity but rather strive to ensure we receive a standard of constant medical services which is our right and equal to that elsewhere.

We are after all a modern age Country, one of the most dynamic, smartest and wealthiest democracies in the world. At least, that is what we are told.

Yet something as crucial as the presence and retention of a GP in a highly viable long-established country location of some 1500 residents overall is not happening. That despite the previous assurance and undertaking that a GP would be available at the MPS. Western Health and the Minister of Health has miserably failed us.

It is interesting to reflect that the first GP at Dunedoo practised from 1910. A further 19 have done so since meaning a stay on average of some 5 and a half years. If only that could happen today.

I have refrained from comment respecting the

private practise in Wargundy Street. The perception exists the service from there has been less than ideal. It is highly irregular with a heavy recent emphasis on "drop in" GP's. Here today, gone tomorrow, wish varying hours and days of operations. It is hardly engenders confidence. Then it has been further comprised by the absence for good personal reason of the local female GP.

It is interesting that for a considerable period now Coolah has 3 GP's. One in private practice in Binnia Street and two at the hospital. What are we doing wrong? Recently many accounts have filtered of long-time citizens who have contributed much being required to be hospitalised or receive treatment at adjacent facilities when ordinarily they would have remained here as a GP been available. It seems we have an ageing population, greater needs and fewer options.

How do you feel about sleeping tonight in the knowledge we do not have a GP here sharing the same experience?

So, what is the solution? The local Health Advisory Council seemingly has questions to answer. What are they presiding over? A shambolic situation. Do they share the concerns of this community or are they oblivious to it?

Are they complicit with Western Health administration? What endeavours or overtures have they made recently to address a glaring issue? What communication have they provided to this community?

Then we move to Mr Roy Butler, MLA, Local Member for Barwon since 18th March. A massive geographical electorate embracing many disadvantaged centres west of the Newell Highway. Various of those centres have traditionally over the years' experienced grave problems in adequately providing GP's and health workers. That problem is not only common to Health, Mr Butler surely has a position where he can confront and have the ear of the Minister.

On the 6th of June 2019, I had a lengthy telephone conversation with the MLA's Secretary out of his Narrabri office. I expounded my views re Health issues here. Some weeks later, she advised me he was taking the issues to the Health Minister, further, I would be advised in writing, I have had no further contact.

I reason Mr Butler may be at the crossroads. Has he been properly briefed? Does he share the concerns of this community? If so, what is he doing about it? One wonders if he had a goal of achievements when he came to Office. If so, none could have been so noble as to ensure those centres in his electorate crying out for the permanent placement of GP's were so provided. Imagine the impetus he would gain.

I have views regarding incentives such as increased financial support and community consultative forums (in certain defined clusters), the latter supported by say Mr Butler in an ex-officio role. More about that another time perhaps as space may be an issue.

I would hope many may share my concerns. I believe we have to move forward; nothing comes from nothing. If you care to contact me even if you have an alternative view. Please do so on 0473 087104. This is serious business.

Warren Bull

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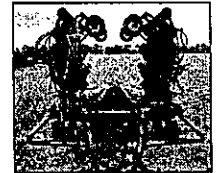
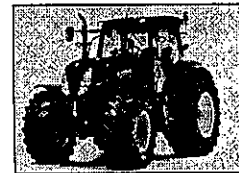
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