



## **CONCERNS REGARDING ACUTE CARE SERVICES IN EP HOSPITALS**

**20 July 2004**

Member for Flinders Liz Penfold has grave concerns regarding the future of acute care services in Eyre Peninsula hospitals.

Mrs Penfold has been unable to get a clear assurance from the Minister for Health Lea Stevens about the continuation of the services.

On 6th August 2002 the Minister was "happy" to say on the record that there was no intention to make any changes to acute care services in the ten hospitals on Eyre Peninsula.

However two years later she now refuses to give an assurance that her government will maintain these services and also reinstate obstetrics and surgery to those hospitals that currently lack them.

In Parliament yesterday Mrs Penfold asked a direct question of the Minister that acute care services would continue to be funded in the 10 hospitals beyond 2004 and that obstetrics and surgery would be reinstated where these had been lost.

Ms Stevens sidestepped the issue in a convoluted response and did not answer the question.

The Minister quoted the General Manager of the Eyre Regional Health Service Gary Stewart but did not take responsibility herself.

She quoted Mr Stewart as saying that there would be no hospital "closures" but no mention was made about the downgrading of hospitals to aged care facilities without acute care services. On radio Ms Stevens said that "it was nonsense to assert that the only thing that a hospital can do is acute care; that view went out decades ago," which raises doubt about what the government intends to do in the future.

The capital works quoted all referred to aged care upgrades except for a small expenditure at Cowell Hospital. No mention was made of the funding from the Federal Government for aged care facilities.

Mrs Penfold believes that at least two hospitals are at risk of downgrading by the State Labor Government.

"Eyre Peninsula will never be able to attract adequate doctors, nurses and allied health professionals without adequate funding and longer contracts where these apply.

"Demand will naturally reduce where these qualified people are unavailable yet this is indicated as a reason for downgrading hospital status," she said.

Mrs Penfold said health professionals would not relocate to Eyre Peninsula for six months and then find that they had to go somewhere else because their contract was not renewed.

And professionals and workers in other fields such as education, particularly those with families, would not choose to live where there was not a doctor.

"This is a backhand way of cutting services to rural and regional Eyre Peninsula and that has a significant flow-on effect throughout the whole community.

"I am incensed at the Minister's diversionary tactics and I suggest that for her own credibility she stop fudging the issue.

"The buck stops with her as Minister and she cannot hide behind departmental staff who have to work with the decisions and funding that the Minister and her government make.

"I challenge her to state categorically on record that acute care services will continue in the ten hospitals on Eyre Peninsula beyond 2004," she said.