

System in crisis' as hospitals fail most targets

HOSPITALS in Victoria are still failing to meet five out of nine performance targets, prompting the Australian Medical Association to declare the system to be in crisis.

Health: All are talking about Health. What is health? We can say health means, the state of not having any kind illness. Of course, both our body and mind should be healthy.

The failures in treating urgent and emergency patients within time limits were highlighted in the annual report on the performance of the state's hospitals, released yesterday.

Hospitals fell well short of the 80 per cent target of emergency patients transferred to a bed within eight hours, posting just a 67 per cent success rate. Hospitals also missed targets on time limits for treating some elective-surgery patients.

The four criteria where hospitals met their benchmarks included seeing all critical patients immediately and admitting urgent elective patients for surgery within 30 days, as well as treating non-urgent cases within time limits.

The report blamed industrial action by nurses, combined with one of the worst winter illness seasons in recent years and a record number of patients, for putting extra stress on emergency departments.

The Government came under fire for releasing the report amid a packed news cycle dominated by the US economic crisis and the Council of Australian Governments meeting.

The report showed that 37,529 patients were waiting for elective surgery in June this year. Health Minister Daniel Andrews said this was 2000 fewer than six months ago and record health funding was having an impact.

Mr Andrews said more patients were treated within benchmark times despite record demand for health services.

But AMA state president Doug Travis said the report showed a pattern of unacceptable delays that could cost lives.

"Lengthy waits can seriously increase risk of complications and even death," he said.

"All public hospital patients should be seen within the clinically appropriate times.

"Our hospitals are in crisis; we have a growing population coupled with a chronic shortage of nurses, doctors and beds to care for patients.

"We hear about the problems these shortages are causing every day. I hope this is a wake-up call to the Government the system is at breaking point."

He accused the Government of manipulating the figures by creating one new target that it could always meet.

Acting Opposition Leader Peter Ryan said the report revealed "a pathetic performance" that was "reflective of the Government overall".

"The Government set these benchmarks itself and the notion that it would set them without the expectation that it would satisfy them is just ridiculous."

Mr Andrews called for the federal Government to pump more money into the Victorian health system to restore the state-federal funding mix from the current 60-40 ratio to 50-50.

He said the commonwealth should assist with extra GPs in Victoria as there was evidence that patients with minor complaints who were unable to find a family doctor were resorting to hospitals for help.

But Dr Travis described that view as "a complete and absolute furphy".

"Yes, we need more GPs to look after general practice, (but) that will do nothing to relieve the problems in emergency departments," he said.

By: Rick Wallace, Victorian political reporter | October 03, 2008

Source: www.theaustralian.news.com.au