

Submission to the
Our Healthcare Future paper
of the Minister for Health.

By Fran Thompson

Better Community Care

Modernising Tasmania's Health System

Planning for the Future.

I believe the issue of information technology systems is vital for our health system in Tasmania and goes across all three of the above Improvement Areas of the Paper. Without information on and for consumers, our system will continue to be sub optimal and patients will be at risk. This should extend within the Tasmanian Health System state-wide, across all areas of public and private health inclusively. Whilst we have two systems of health available to Tasmanians, we need to improve the flow of information and communication as many consumers access both public and private.

Any improvements in Community Care requires investment in information technology between THS services and the GPs and any other service that the community uses in management of their own health. My experience on committees within THS particularly RHH is that there have been various projects which have attempted to get around the lack of investment in 21st century technology. Findings after many hours of work on the part of the medical and administrative staff, showed the lack of investment in a cohesive system to transfer patient information could only be patched up and information flow would remain inadequate until a state-wide system was determined and purchased. Without such a solution, patients remain at risk and their overall management and care will be jeopardised and far from best practice. I have since had several experiences myself where the frustration of the GP due to inadequacies of information flowing from the RHH and other services was extreme. I have learnt to ensure the transfer of information myself, rather than rely on it moving through the system to the appropriate referral or referee. This is not possible for all the community who may not have that knowledge and technology available to them. It is essential for a comprehensive care model for complex care cases, chronic disease management. It is a shame that GPs and other health professionals accept this inadequacy as how it is, despite the hard work of GP Liaison Officers within RHH, it is clearly accepted and they are always limited by the incompatibility of systems, lack of smooth pathways, some lack of procedures. That in itself spoils the relationships between GPs and public health system and increases risks to patients. The report of the NW outbreak of COVID-19 showed that the system was inadequate for contact tracing of staff and patients and this is yet another example showing up our inferior systems in Tasmania.

Telehealth was able to be put in place at short notice during COVID-19. It is a great asset to patients where appropriate. Can this be extended and enhanced and assist with rural health?

Set out in the consultation paper is a ten-year plan to update the information systems with immediate plans for staff management systems. This is inadequate and its' priority should be raised. Systems updates are many, many years overdue and to put off for another ten years creates more risks, and why, we moved fast with Telehealth, bring the plan forward and prioritise funds in 2021/2 Budget.

My Health Record could be much better utilised. I have asked twice for my records to be uploaded by the GP but the practice will not do it. I think they are not paid adequately to do it. Why not work with Primary Health Tasmania and Commonwealth Department of Health to have this asset better used in conjunction with a THS system that is sophisticated enough to talk to MHR system.

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The more we come up with services in the community which reduce the need for attendance at the Emergency Department the safer the community will be and the better resources will be targeted to those needing them. Again, the communication between the two is vital. Ultimately, people respond to services within their community and only resort to Emergency health when they don't know about or there are no community care services and they are feeling very concerned. Closer work between hospital and the community health services promotes better care. Increasing Chronic Disease Self-Management principles and practices and training of staff and members of the community builds self-confidence better mental health and saves resources. As part of the Population Health and Prevention strategy, where forward thinking and investment for the future would create good mental and physical health for staff and the community. Using well thought out communication strategy for advertising and education in the public space to promote self-management would be supported by modern technology and systems. This also requires all medical staff to have training in patient centred care and systems to support it and consumer input not only in their care, but in decisions in strategic decisions on policy and practical decisions.

Many advocates are well educated in systems and other experiences in health systems. However, all the consultation will not help unless Government invests in the latest technology for their communication systems and information systems. With this as a high priority and with patient centred care using chronic disease self-management principles and practice, what is an excellent health system propped up by conscientious, caring and very hard-working staff can be a lot more effective, and efficiently use funds, our current service could better serve the people of Tasmania.

Many of the Initiatives listed in the paper and the questions are too technical for me to elaborate on and hopefully all staff will be asked to contribute how this could work from their perspective on the ground. From a consumer's perspective, I can only point out the areas that in my experience seem to be very obvious, all of which are underpinned by the fact that for years Tasmanian Government of either party have neglected to invest in modern systems and now is the time to change that as a very high priority. Perhaps COVID-19 has brought this to a higher priority or government budgets, lets hope so.

Fran Thompson

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