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media release

Melanoma Unit review findings released

A review of the Melanoma Unit at Calvary Mater Newcastle has now been completed and has made a number of recommendations aimed at improving and strengthening the service.

Hunter New England Health Chief Executive Dr Nigel Lyons initiated the external review of the service in December 2009, after specialists and the hospital's management reached an impasse about how the Unit should be run.

"An independent external review was undertaken to ensure this important service is delivered to the highest quality and leads to improvements in patient care – as well as leaving the Unit in a strong and viable position moving forward," Dr Lyons said.

The review was conducted independently by World-renowned cancer expert Professor Bruce Armstrong, Professor of Public Health, University of Sydney and Professor Kate White, Director Research Support Unit, Faculty of Nursing, University of Sydney.

Professors Armstrong and White undertook extensive research and interviews with key stakeholders to look into and recommend any changes that address systemic or institutional issues in the delivery of safe and effective clinical services in the Melanoma Unit.

"Along with National Director of Public Hospitals for Little Company of Mary Health Care*, Mr Walter Kmet, I welcome the review and recommendations. It is very comprehensive and gives all parties a basis to improve services at the Melanoma Unit and the ways in which that care is provided to the community," Dr Lyons said.

The reviewers have made 22 recommendations aimed at improving the high quality services for people suspected of having, or diagnosed with, melanoma in the Hunter New England Health area.

"The review identified that the services provided by the Melanoma Unit were of a high quality and based on a sound model of care, and we want to assure the public the Unit offers a world class and valuable service to the local community," Dr Lyons said.

An implementation team has been formed to ensure the recommendations are implemented swiftly and also to monitor and review the progress. The implementation team will include senior representatives from HNE Health, Little Company of Mary Health Care, Calvary Mater Newcastle and the Melanoma Unit.

The implementation team will be ensuring a number of improvements to patient care will result from the review, including:

- Clinical leadership in the Melanoma Unit
- Better relationship between staff
- More efficient operation of the Melanoma Unit clinics
- Potential introduction of a nurse-led clinic
- Residents and registrars rotating through the service

- Better relationship between the Unit and the Calvary Mater Newcastle management

Dr Lyons and Mr Kmet stressed that the Review Team found the Melanoma Unit has been operating according to a valid and well accepted model for the provision of multidisciplinary care to melanoma patients.

“We would like to acknowledge and thank the many people who fully cooperated during the review process, along with the Reviewers. We appreciate this was not an easy time, but your openness, honesty and respect are important, so specific issues can be addressed,” Mr Kmet said.

“We agree with the conclusions and subsequent recommendations. We also look forward to working with Hunter New England Health in overseeing the resolution of a number of quite complex issues, particularly around appointing a clinical leader for the Unit,” Mr Kmet said.

“This review was not about laying blame, or determining who was right and who was wrong. The priority now is to make sure that actions are quickly taken to improve the services, and involving all stakeholders not in the least Calvary Mater Newcastle Management and the Newcastle Melanoma Unit,” Dr Lyons said.

“However, for a number of reasons addressed in the review, the reviewers recommended the Hospital should work with HNE Health to recruit and appoint a Medical Director for the Melanoma Unit, who can provide effective clinical and administrative leadership,” Dr Lyons said.

“More will be done in the coming weeks and months as the implementation team work together to resolve some of the more complex relationship issues, to ensure this valuable community asset with a long history can be enhanced and certainly improved,” Mr Kmet said.

“One of the first actions will be to compare the organisation, structure and performance of the Melanoma Unit with similar units in Australia and indeed internationally, so we can consider how we might improve the administration and operation of the Melanoma Unit’s outpatient clinics.

“As the review points out, once we’ve been able to do this - clinics will be moved back to the Melanoma Unit,” Mr Kmet said.

The Review involved extensive research and interviews with key stakeholders - Calvary Mater Newcastle Melanoma Unit staff, Calvary Mater Newcastle management, HNE Health Area Cancer Services staff and external experts in melanoma care in NSW, along with case reviews and a review of research governance procedures.

** Calvary Mater Newcastle is an Affiliated Health Organisation - owned and operated by the Little Company of Mary Health Care. It provides public health services to patients in the Hunter New England Health region, via funding provided by NSW Government through Hunter New England Health.*

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