

Westmead Morgue Closure “Tip of the Iceberg”

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA) has warned the Westmead coronial morgue closure announced yesterday due to a lack of forensic pathologists is only the ‘tip of the iceberg’ of the problems the NSW Health system will face due to a widespread shortage of pathologists.

CEO of the RCPA, Dr Debra Graves, says the shortage is not limited to forensic pathologists.

“Despite the significant role that pathology plays in all aspects of medicine, there is a severe shortfall in the number of pathologists across all disciplines of pathology – for the living as much as for the dead,” says Dr Graves.

“The closure of the coronial morgue demonstrates that the impending crisis of which the RCPA has been warning the government repeatedly over the last five years is now a reality. There are an insufficient number of pathologists to provide the services the community needs.”

“The NSW Government cannot continue to blame the ‘international shortage’ on the lack of pathologists locally.

“Pathology training is an apprenticeship model, and is the responsibility of the State Government. Clearly, the Government is not doing its job in delivering a sufficient number of training places.

“Importantly, it is time to get over the ‘it can’t happen here’ syndrome that is obviously so prevalent in Australia.

“A recent acknowledgement that the Canadian system was ‘unravelling at the seams’ demonstrates the vulnerability of Governments that ignore the warnings of professional bodies.

The President of the RCPA, Dr Bev Rowbotham says the RCPA has been highlighting the fact that pathology is in crisis for a number of years.

“We have brought this issue to all levels of government to find solutions, says Dr Rowbotham.

“However to date, they have not addressed the problems in a meaningful way, or acted on any of the suggestions we have made to them.

“Pathologists cannot be left out of the healthcare equation. Put simply, without pathology, there cannot be a healthcare system.

“Pathology is the conduit through which all medical diagnosis is determined – including all detected cancers – as well as disease monitoring, treatment, the safe

processing of blood transfusions, prenatal screening ... the list of the areas impacted goes on.”

The RCPA calls on the State to work constructively with the profession – and begin to look for strategies and solutions to the global shortage immediately before the iceberg truly sinks.

“After all, Medicine *is* Pathology.”

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