



**A Message to Our Patients
and
The Broader Community
of the Adelaide Hills**

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Doctors from the medical practices in Lobethal and Gumeracha have attended patients and emergencies at the Gumeracha District Soldiers Memorial Hospital (GDSMH) for decades, and we are well aware of how valued and important this service is to you all. It is a point of pride for us how many we have been able to help over the years.

We love the continuity of care our service to the hospital provides for our patients. From managing the acutely unwell to convalescence and rehabilitation, our little hospital punches well above its weight (and certainly well above its funding!). The care that the hospital is able to provide is exemplary - patients have even compliment the FOOD!

However, as you may be aware, the medical sector in general and our little medical practice in particular, have been dealing with a number of headwinds in recent years. There have been numerous Federal and State Government decisions that have severely impacted General Practice medicine as a career choice for graduates, leading to a massive decline in the number of junior doctors choosing general practice as a career. The Federal Government has undermined General Practice funding for decades, with Medicare rebate freezes and poor planning and implementation of health policy. The recent vaccine rollout is case in point. We have lost a substantial amount of grant funding for essential services, like practice nurses, due to a change in the definition of "rural." It was decided that we were not far enough from Adelaide, regardless of the truly rural medical service we do provide to our hospital and our community. And despite our recent history of fires, floods and broken roads demonstrating how fragile that road link to "the big smoke" really is.

This has led to the current crisis in our medical workforce. We have spent years pleading with the health bureaucracy at all levels for assistance but have had no success. Both the State and Federal Ministers for Health have heard our case, and have not been moved to help.

Then COVID19 hit and we have been scrambling to cope with all that entails.

But thankfully, things are looking up. We are getting on with vaccinations, and so far managing to keep everybody (patients and staff) in our clinic safe and well. We are also excited to announce that we have managed to recruit several trainee GPs who we hope will love the practice and our community so much that they stay around for many years to come. You will be pleased to know that there will soon be a lot more appointments available. With your support we hope to be able to show them the wonderful lifestyle a medical career in the Adelaide Hills can offer. However, Registrars are doctors on their

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P-plates. They are fully qualified, but until they pass that final exam, they must have senior back-up available.

The 4 Practice Principals are therefore responsible for 24/7 medical care of all the patients in the GDSMH and the associated nursing homes, as well as their day jobs seeing patients in their clinic. Meanwhile we are trying to provide vaccination to everyone under constantly changing criteria and managing COVID patients in the community. If we get called out to an emergency in the middle of the night, or on the weekend, we do not get time off in lieu, and we do not get guaranteed minimum time off-duty. We have patients booked the next day and we are committed to seeing them. But tired is not safe, and we do not want to compromise the care we provide.

We need to practice what we preach. In addition to a balanced diet, regular exercise we recommend work-life balance and attention to family and friends. And that is just not possible when you are on-call and need to be available every 4th day.

Therefore, it is with great regret, that we must inform the community that we do not have enough independent, fully qualified doctors to staff the GDSMH Emergency Department in a safe manner. It will not be able to open until such time as we have more support and doctors available.

We are committed to continue looking after the hospital and nursing home patients for the foreseeable future. The government has announced an increase in funding for rural hospitals, but it remains to be seen how much of that promise survives the election. Until then the GDSMH remains understaffed and underfunded for the work it is expected to do. The new agreement has no increase in funding for our emergency department, which is funded by the federal government, and they still regard our hospital as not rural enough.

If you have concerns about the lack of Government support for your Health Service then please let our health bureaucrats and the politicians know. With an election coming up they might actually pay attention to what the community want.

Please know that we totally understand that this is disappointing for the community. We simply ask for understanding and support while we try our best to keep you, and us healthy and safe.

- If you have an emergency, call 000.
- 24/7 Medical care is available at Gawler, Mt Barker, and Modbury Hospital.
- Urgent after-hours advice is available by calling 13 SICK.
- The Womens and Children Hospital offers a virtual urgent care service:
<https://www.wch.sa.gov.au/patients-visitors/emergencies/virtual-urgent-care>

Thank you for your Understanding and Support

Sincerely

The Team at Gum Medical