THE BUCK STOPS WITH THE MINISTER

The Health Minister, Chris Burns, has been exposed as totally incompetent by the Coronial Inquest into the death of Mrs Margaret Winter on the 16th December 2006.

The Coroner, Greg Cavanagh, has found there were significant nursing staff deficiencies on the 13th of December 2006, the day Mrs Winter fell from her bed, those shortages contributed to Mrs Winter’s death and that those shortages were ongoing at the Royal Darwin Hospital in 2006/07.

Yet on the 18th of December 2006, just two days after Mrs Winter’s tragic death, the Minister issued a media release claiming the health system was in good shape and that the Government stood by its health staffing record.

“The Health Minister must take responsibility for the unnecessary death of Mrs Winter and the continuing suffering of her family,” says Matt Conlan, Shadow Minister for Health.

“Rather than facing the facts that the health system was severely understaffed and placing patients at risk, the Minister stuck his head in the sand and pretended everything was in good shape.

“Well it wasn’t, as virtually everyone knew. Indeed the Health Minister’s media release of the 18th of December 2006 was in response to comments from the then Opposition Health spokesperson, Dr Richard Lim on the same day. Dr Lim said;

‘Nurses in our public hospitals are already working at the limit of their endurance with regular overtime and even double shifts now the norm.
‘The real fear is that the stalled negotiations will drive more nurses from the Territory stretching resources beyond breaking point.
‘If so, the ultimate losers will be the patients.
‘Tired overstretched nurses are inevitably more prone to making mistakes.

“This is just the latest example of repeat failings under this Minister. In Chris Burns’ time a patient has been left to die alone at a remote airstrip and another patient died after her doctor went on leave and nobody knew.

“Despite having the largest per capita budget in the country, the Minister has delivered unacceptably long waiting times in Emergency Departments and a massive blow-out in elective surgery waiting lists.

“The Health Minister now needs an honest appraisal of his performance.”

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