Women in East Arnhem Land will again be able to give birth locally, following the re-establishment of full maternity services at Gove District Hospital (GDH) from 5 May 2009.

Health Minister, Kon Vatskalis, said re-establishing maternity services for Gove District Hospital had been a very challenging process, which included:

- continued advertising in Australian national and state newspapers and websites since 2007;
- negotiations with 32 locum agencies within Australia and overseas to find medical staff with the right skills;
- regular phone discussions with potential applicants, both nationally and internationally;
- letters to over 2300 GP Obstetricians in Australia registered with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists inviting them to work in Gove;
- a representative from GDH attended a British Medical Journal Career Fair in London to recruit a suitable medical practitioner.

“I’m advised we have contacted almost every doctor in Australia suitably qualified for this position,” said Mr Vatskalis.

“The Northern Territory Government is committed to providing continuity of maternal care to families in the East Arnhem Land region.

“Gove District Hospital is re-instating obstetric services utilising medical locum agencies. This interim arrangement will provide an extension of maternity services to allow Gove District Hospital to continue finalising its intensive recruitment campaign for permanent medical officers with obstetrical skills.

“GP Obstetricians and Anaesthetists are a rare breed and the Territory is confident we can secure GP Obstetricians for Gove District Hospital at a time when there is a world-wide shortage of experts in this area.

“As the Minister responsible, I demand real results from my Department and I am proud of the work Health Department CE Dr David Ashbridge and his team have done in finding answers to this problem.”

Until the re-establishment of full maternity services from 5 May 2009 the Government will pay transport and accommodation costs of expectant Mothers to travel to Darwin or Katherine with a friend or relative to give birth.

MEDIA NOTE: Minister Vatskalis will be available for doorstop at Parliament House at 3:30pm.

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