Minister Sat On Oncology Report While Cancer Victims Suffered

Cancer patients suffer financial and physical hardship while the Territory Minister for Health, Peter Toyne, deliberately sat for two years, on a report detailing the economic and social needs to develop a Radiation Oncology Unit at the Royal Darwin Hospital.

The Frommer Report was given to the Health Minister in July 2004 and it recommended the construction of a Radiation Oncology unit. It said ‘Irrefutable arguments exist to support the establishment of a radiotherapy service in the NT’ and put a business case for the unit.

The Report went onto describe the hardships suffered by Territory cancer patients when they were sent down south for treatment.

“The Government has operated a Patient Assistance Travel Scheme for many years, where in the absence of a Radiation Oncology Unit, pays for cancer patients to travel to other centres.” Dr Lim said.

“The PATS scheme is inflexible and meagre in terms of what it offers, forcing patients to travel on their own, at the time when they are suffering from a life threatening cancer, and providing only $30 a day all up, to stay at a motel while receiving radiation treatment.

“The inflexibility of the flights booked by PATS forces patients, still ill from the effects of radiation, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, to travel back to the Territory within one day of completion of treatment.

“What offends me is that the Minister for Health has received this report that outlines the suffering people who go through on the PATS system and says that an oncology unit is ‘irrefutably’ needed.

“Rather than living up to the promise made in 2001 to build a Radiation Oncology unit the Minister puts the Frommer Report into a drawer and hides it for two years until it is leaked by disgruntled people with access to it.

“Had the Minister commenced development of the Unit at the time he received the Frommer Report, the Radiation Oncology Unit will be operational today.

“The Minister had cold heartedly and insensitively ignored the plight of Territory cancer sufferers for the last two years, putting them through the hardship that no patient should undergo.

“The Minister’s behaviour is nothing shy of being reprehensible. Playing with people’s suffering in this fashion is short sighted, cynical to the extreme and ill considered.

“Cancer patients deserve better treatment from the Labor Government than what this Minister provides.”

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