

27 July 2021

Hon. Pierre Yang MLC
Chair, Standing Committee on Public Administration
C/- Legislative Council Committee Office
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
West Perth WA 6005
lcpac@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr Yang

Inquiry into the delivery of ambulance services in Western Australia

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) thanks the Standing Committee on Public Administration for the opportunity to provide input into this inquiry.

The RACGP is Australia's largest general practice organisation, representing over 90% of Australia's general practitioners (GPs). We advocate for affordable and equitable access to high-quality health services and improved health outcomes for all Australians. GPs work with patients on a wide range of issues and understand the complex interaction between health, social issues, workforce participation and the ability to access education.

In relation to the inquiry's terms of reference, our members have identified the following issues

- Volunteer workforce
- After hours transfers
- Medically-trained escorts

Volunteer workforce

It is a struggle to recruit volunteer ambulance crews in parts of Western Australia. In Meekatharra, for example, there are only 4 volunteers who also have full time jobs. There appears to be a lack of awareness in the community about the demand for ambulance services and volunteers required to support that service. We would like to see a stronger public engagement campaign to recruit volunteers with greater emphasis on community responsibility.

Improved after hours utilisation of ambulance services

Our rural GPs report feedback from crews questioning whether their after midnight contribution was really needed when they had a stable patient under the care of the Emergency Telehealth Service (ETS) at a catchment site who could have waited until morning for transfer. In many instances, it is appropriate to transfer from single nurse and on call nursing posts, however it is also happening from fully staffed hospitals.

Intra-hospital patient transfers afterhours place volunteer crews at increased risk due to night conditions (eg animal strike, wet weather, fatigue). It is also a disincentive for those volunteers with full time jobs.

Medically-trained escorts

Unwell patients cannot be managed en-route by volunteers without medical training. There are often delays finding nurses or paramedics for transfers between catchment sites. Consequently, when a transfer does occur a nursing shortage at the regional post or hospital occurs when the nurse is requested to escort the patient transfer.

Thank you for considering our submission. If you would like to discuss any of the above matters further, please contact us care of the RACGP WA State Manager, Mr Hamish Milne

Yours sincerely

Dr Sean Stevens
Chair, RACGP WA

Dr Ramya Raman
Deputy Chair, RACGP WA