

Doorstop at the Mersey Community Hospital

PRIME MINISTER:

It is a beautiful here in Latrobe and it is great to be here at the Mersey. A hospital that is at the heart of this community.

It has been part of the community for so many years and generations. Julie Duff, the head of nursing, acting General Manager, while Eric has got broader responsibilities – Julie's worked here for 42 years and you came here to work with your mum – isn't that right?

JULIE DUFF, ACTING-GENERAL MANAGER, MERSEY COMMUNITY HOSPITAL:

Yeah, that's correct.

PRIME MINISTER:

This is a treasured part of such a strong community, beloved part of the community.

There has been a lot of uncertainty over the future of the hospital for a long time. We have brought all of that to an end.

I am here with the Mayor and with Senator Duniam and we are delighted to announce that we have committed, we are paying \$730 million to the Tasmanian Government to secure the future of this hospital, the funding for this hospital for the next decade.

It will return formally to the ownership of the Tasmanian Government which is where it should be so that it can work seamlessly as part of Tasmania's One Health System, its public hospital system which of course we are providing substantial support for – \$2 billion over the next five years, increasing by 10 per cent over that period.

So this is an example of the commitment we have to strong public health, right across Australia but especially here, here in Latrobe today – assuring the future, the security of the Mersey Hospital.

It means so much to this community and we are delighted to be here to announce this.

The Premier is sorry he can't be standing with me today but as you know Parliament is sitting and his duties require him to be in Hobart. But Will and I have spoken a lot about this as we have reached this agreement in recent times. I have spoken with him this morning and he'll be making this announcement in due course in Hobart today.

So it is a wonderful day for the Mersey. You can see how pleased the

community are, how pleased the staff are. 470 staff – is that right?

ERIC DANIELS, GROUP DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS NORTH/NORTH-WEST HEALTH SERVICES:

That's about right sir.

PRIME MINISTER:

470 staff. It is a great day. Julie do you want to say something about the importance of the hospital to you?

JULIE DUFF:

I think the most important part from my perspective is that certainly it means a lot for the community. And the community has stepped forward on many occasions, it has endured many, many changes. We are a large population, I believe, in this area and certainly expanding as recent stats will prove, certainly, the Latrobe district is expanding. So it is essential the hospital does stay here. We have a 24/7 emergency department and having seen this hospital grow, expand and refurbishment completed over the years, I can only say that personally I am very grateful for the funding. I plan on being around for some of those ten years.

(Laughs)

And I am sure the community will be celebrating on this day.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you so much.

JULIE DUFF:

And thank you.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you for your extraordinary services – and two generations!

JULIE DUFF:

Yes, absolutely.

(Laughs)

Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER:

It's wonderful. Such love and such commitment to the community. Thank you.

Jono, did you want to say a few words?

SENATOR DUNIAM:

Thanks PM, yeah look thank you very much Malcolm for coming down to Tasmania and for reaching this agreement with the Tasmania Government. As you've seen inside the importance of this facility to this community cannot be underestimated. So the commitment you've made on behalf of the Australian Government to this community and to this hospital is just great and we thank you for coming down and for doing what you've done for Tasmania, so thank you very much.

PRIME MINISTER:

Very good. Your worship? The Acting Mayor –

RICK ROCKLIFF, ACTING MAYOR, LATROBE COUNCIL:

Look I think it is the best piece of news we've had in this area for a long, long time and I'm very positive about it. I think it will give people confidence to invest in other businesses that associate with the hospitals and with people coming from other parts of the state here for selective surgery – they'll stay in the town, coffee shops, overnight accommodation and things like that and I think it is just a wonderful step forward. I'd like to congratulate you.

PRIME MINISTER:

That's great. Thank you. Now you're the Director of the North and North West of Tasmania? So tell us about this. How important this is for you?

ERIC DANIELS:

Fantastic – thank you Prime Minister, we really are very pleased. I can now go to the supermarket and meet with local members of the community and now be able to say that we've got assured funding for ten years. They'll be very happy about having some stability and as you know the critical part of the Mersey as part of the Tasmanian health system. The sort of services that the Mersey provides will be a significant benefit to this community and elsewhere, so thank you very much – we really appreciate it.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you. Do we have some questions?

JOURNALIST:

Why does Northern Tasmania need three public hospitals an hour apart to service the population the size of a couple of Melbourne or Sydney suburbs?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well these hospitals provide a vital service to the community. You've just heard from the head of nursing and the commitment that they have made, the support from the community is absolutely critical. So this is a vital part of supporting the public health of Tasmanians.

JOURNALIST:

Isn't three public hospitals in this area excessive?

PRIME MINISTER:

I don't think anyone has ever, I have never heard anyone make that suggestion before.

JOURNALIST:

Our State Government has already turned back some services here by getting rid of birthing. Do you think giving it back to the State Government is in the best interest of the community?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the State Government manages the public health system of Tasmania. Our role right across Australia is to provide support which is activity based funding as you know. The funding for Tasmania over the next five years is growing, around 10 per cent, it will be \$2 billion over the next five years. So we are partners in delivering first class public health and hospital services for Tasmanians here.

JOURNALIST:

The Federal Government took over the Mersey to stop the state government at the time downgrading. This Liberal Government is basically doing what that failed state Labor government tried to do. So how does you handing it back to the state protect it against more cuts?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the State Government has made it very clear that they are committed to the future of the Mersey. They've invested in it. The management of the, well perhaps Eric could answer this better – but the manager, we were just talking, I don't know whether you were with us inside the hospital, but we were talking with the head of emergency about how the three hospitals in this area, North-West, Launceston and Mersey public hospitals work together as they should. You've got the ability to video conference with other hospitals in Tasmania. You've got the ability to share the expertise. That's pulling it all together. That's the One Health Strategy isn't Eric?

ERIC DANIELS:

Correct, that's part of the white paper implementation, as you know.

And the services at the Mersey, there are still a significant level of services at the Mersey associated with birthing but not the actual birthing because the clinical leadership of obstetrics and gynecology determined that they needed to have all of their resources for the actual birthing part in one area. That is critical for the recruitment of obstetric and maternity staff but the Mersey is still providing an extended midwifery care service,

significant anti-natal services and midwifery group practice.

So there is still a lot of involvement in the birthing process.

JOURNALIST:

We're told that women are having babies in ambulances because they can't, the capacity isn't there in Launceston or Bernie to cope.

ERIC DANIELS:

Well we have investigated that and provided a response previously and there's no evidence that supports that. We actually had a meeting with the contracted provider earlier in the week and when the State Health Minister was visiting and there was no evidence. We're happy to investigate any consolidated reports of that but anecdotally yes, but we've not get any evidence that supports that.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister the Mersey is the only hospital in Australia that's federally funded, the fact that you're handing it back to the State Government in ten years, is that a recognition of the fact that the federal-funded model doesn't work?

PRIME MINISTER:

You're right. It was a special case. Actually all public hospitals receive federal funding but the Mersey was a unique case where the Commonwealth Government acquired it, as you know, in 2007 and it has provided for the funding for the cost of running the hospital ever since.

In fact, over \$500 million has been provided over that time.

So what this does is bring forward in one payment the funding that would have been provided over 10 years so that it gives Tasmania the funding, the flexibility and, of course, that's matched with their commitment to maintain the hospital here in Mersey and continue to provide these outstanding services.

JOURNALIST:

So the federally funded model is not an option anymore?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I say all hospitals, all public hospitals receive federal funding. So they all do under the activity-based funding model. The federal funding is seen, is represented right across the state.

I mean here in Tasmania, leaving aside Mersey, putting it to one side, the rest of the public hospital system over the next five years will receive over \$2 billion of federal funding.

But, yes, federal ownership of a public hospital, that was one case here in Mersey and now it is returning to the ownership of the state where, I think where it properly should be and I think most people recognise that that's the best place for it to be.

JOURNALIST:

How long have you been in negotiations with the government for over this deal?

PRIME MINISTER:

Negotiations have continued for some months so there's been discussions between health ministers and discussions between the Premier and myself. But the agreement, this agreement was reached recently.

I thought it was important, given the anxiety, the uncertainty it produced in the community it was important to announce it as soon as possible and to announce it here at the Mersey, here in Latrobe because this is the community the hospital serves and this is the community who have been concerned and are now relieved by knowing that the future of the hospital is secure.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, do you believe the state government will be able to fund this after the ten years?

PRIME MINSITER:

Well, after the ten years, the federal funding formula that applies to every other hospital will continue so the answer to that is yes.

JOURNALIST:

Are you considering changes to capital gains tax to help increase housing supply?

PRIME MINISTER:

Look, thank you. The budget is in May. We don't have long to wait.

JOURNALIST:

Is the Government considering a proposal to allow Australians to access their super to save for a house deposit?

PRIME MINSITER:

Again, thank you for your inquiry. As we get closer to the Budget, there's more speculation and as we get closer to the Budget the best thing for me to do is to say wait until the Budget.

JOURNALIST:

Jacqui Lambie was on breakfast television this morning saying the Liberal Party is divisive and that you're gone. What's your response to that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Thanks for the headline.

JOURNALIST:

Will you give us an update on the drug bust in Melbourne?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, thank you. Look, this was nearly a tonne of ice so this is a great credit to our Border Protection and our police in confiscating this enormous shipment and this follows hard on the heels of a previous interception of nearly three quarters of a tonne of ice.

Now, our response to ice is ruthless interception of trafficking, of smuggling, of dealing. We are working domestically and internationally to catch these merchants of death, these people who traffic in ice, to catch them and intercept their deadly cargoes and we're successful in doing that.

At the same time, we're working with compassion with the community and with people who have become subject to ice addiction to help them.

So our ice program right across the country is working with front-line services to ensure, in line with Ken Lay's recommendations and his task force that they get the support they need.

Ice is a scourge, it destroys lives, it destroys families and communities. So whether it is at the border and dealing with the traffickers and the criminals that peddle this poison or whether it is dealing with the victims, we are focused on that and working hand in glove with the states and territories to ensure that we provide the support that victims of ice addiction receive so they can recover. And also, as I said, we will be ruthless in our efforts to stop the smuggling and the trafficking of this drug and it's been a great credit to the police and our security services with this interception today.

I know the Minister, Michael Keenan, will have more to say about it in the course of the day.

JOURNALIST:

Was the funding here at the Mersey today contingent on the state government taking it back in ten years? Was it a case of you don't get the money unless you take it back?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well part of the arrangement is that the state is taking back the ownership of the hospital which I think is, clearly this is a public hospital in

Tasmania, and the right owner for it is clearly the state government of Tasmania.

JOURNALIST:

Just one more from Canberra, what do you make of the RBA Governor's warning the Australian economy could be at risk due to the combination of low wage growth and rising property debt?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I've read the Governor's speech. I've noticed some of the commentary appears to have been based on reports of the speech rather than reading the speech.

Look, it is a timely warning. There is always a concern about, you know when property prices rise too quickly and this is particularly an issue in Sydney and in Melbourne.

The prudential controls that the regulators are requiring the banks to impose to limit the amount of interest-only loans for investors is timely again and I think the Governor's speech should be heeded very carefully, but it is always a, it is, you know, this is the role of the central bank, to monitor these movements in prices and ensure that there is some restraint and you can see that the restraint or the restriction in the amount of interest-only loans made to investors is a very timely one.

JOURNALIST:

Should young people be able to use their superannuation savings to help them buy their first house?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well thank you. This is an issue that's been debated for a long time and I know there's a lot of speculation about that. But I think all of these matters that are being debated in the context of the Budget, I'll await, and encourage everyone to wait for the Budget. Okay –

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, the Hobart City Council voted this week to examine moving its Australia Day celebrations. Do you have any thoughts on that at all?

PRIME MINISTER:

Australia Day should remain exactly where it is on January 26. It's Australia Day and it is our national day and I don't think, with all due respects to the council, I think that the vast majority of Australians expect our national day to remain exactly where it is.

Thank you all very much.

[ENDS]

[Suspected Chemical Weapons Attack in Syria](#)

The Australian Government condemns in the strongest possible terms the chemical weapons attack against civilians, including children, at Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib Province, Syria on 4 April 2017.

The use of chemical weapons is illegal and abhorrent.

While the full facts are still to be determined, if the Assad regime is responsible for this attack those who approved and deployed these weapons must be held accountable.

The use of chemical weapons is in violation of international law, including the Chemical Weapons Convention and UNSCR 2118. These abuses cannot continue to be committed with impunity.

We welcome and support the United Nations' efforts to verify the details of this latest attack. There also needs to be an independent, international investigation into the incident.

Russia and Iran, as countries engaged in the Syrian conflict, should use their influence to pressure the Assad regime to cease illegal, chemical attacks against its own people. We call on Russia and Iran to take genuine steps to enforce a ceasefire in Syria.

The UN Security Council needs to address this situation as soon as possible. We call on the Council to take action in response to this attack.

The continuing deaths of civilians in the Syrian conflict is deplorable. Australia is addressing the conflict in Syria through our military and humanitarian efforts, and through our autonomous sanctions.

We call on all parties to reduce the violence and engage in UN-brokered efforts to find a political solution to this terrible conflict.

[CPC cadres urged to take lead in](#)

[promotion of good values](#)

The Communist Party of China (CPC) has urged its officials to take the lead in promoting good values among ordinary citizens, according to a guideline.

According to the guideline, issued by the Central Commission for Guiding Ethic and Cultural Progress, CPC officials, especially leading officials, should practise the core values of socialism and practice a disciplined work style.

Ideological, patriotism and moral education among CPC members should be advanced, it said.

It was also suggested that a recording system should be established and rule of law improved.

[Hospital closed after patient kills people with chopstick](#)

A hospital in Henan province where a patient killed three people with a chopstick has been closed to allow for an investigation into its standards.

The man, identified as Yang, attacked four women at the privately run Da Zhong Hospital after breaking free of his restraints on Feb 24, according to a statement from the Luoning county government on Tuesday.

All of the victims were patients. One of the women died at the scene, while two others died in hospital from their injuries.

The mental health hospital is "suspected of chaotic management" and has been closed while an investigation team looks into the attack, the statement said. It added that two county health officials in charge of supervising local hospitals have been dismissed.

"The county's public security authority has placed Yang under criminal coercive measures and a thorough investigation is ongoing," the government said without elaborating. Coercive measures can include detention and 24-hour monitoring.

The killings, first reported on Saturday by The Paper, a news website based in Shanghai, happened on the night Yang was admitted to the hospital.

"Yang is a schizophrenic," The Paper quoted an anonymous source at the hospital as saying. "He looked potentially dangerous during a health check after he was admitted, so we treated him as a priority patient. We asked his

relatives to look after him and assigned a member of our staff to regularly observe him.”

Yang refused to take medicine or meals, “and we had to fasten him to his bed with restraints”, the source said.

On Tuesday, nine minutes of footage from a surveillance camera at the hospital that captured parts of the attack began to spread on social media.

In the video, a man believed to be Yang is lying on a hospital bed and appears to free his hands from restraints at 8:21 pm. Seven minutes later, he picks up a chopstick from a nearby table and walks off-camera into another room shared by two of the victims.

He then returns to the room about 30 seconds later and is seen stabbing two other women in the head with the chopstick.

According to The Paper, the last time a staff member checked on Yang was at about 5:30 pm, even though the hospital said such checks were carried out every half hour.

[Kids adopted by Chinese mourn Japanese war](#)



A group from Japan visits three Chinese women in Harbin on Tuesday who raised children abandoned by Japanese families after World War II. Three Japanese visitors had been among those children, but none had been raised by the women. [Photo by Liu Yang/China Daily]

A group from Japan mourned victims of Japan's invasion and occupation of northeastern China before and during World War II and called on their leaders to visit China to apologize for war crimes on Tuesday.

The group of 41 was organized by people abandoned as children in China by Japanese families at the end of the war, and included three of them who had returned to Japan. The visit took place on Qingming Festival, the most important occasion for Chinese to honor the dead.

They visited Unit 731 Museum in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province, and mourned the more than 3,000 people tortured and killed there. Unit 731 was the Japanese army's germ warfare division, which engaged in experiments on humans.

"It's horrifying to see some of the items on display. Some of them were beyond what I could bear to see," said Nakajima Yohachi, who helped organize the visit.

More than 4,000 Japanese children were adopted in China after World War II, according to media reports. Most have gone back to Japan.

Nakajima, 75, moved to Heilongjiang in 1942 with his family but was abandoned in 1945. He returned to Japan in 1958. He said he wouldn't have survived if it were not for his Chinese parents.

The left-behind children also met with three of the adoptive mothers and gave them gifts. The children they adopted were not in the group.

"Many Japanese are deceived as the history is either distorted or understated in Japanese textbooks," Nakajima said. "We volunteered to come with our own money. We are all peace lovers. We hope Japanese people will gain more knowledge of history, and we also hope there will be no war anymore.

"I think Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe should come to China to apologize for the atrocities and reflect on history. If he doesn't come, many Japanese like me will feel sorry for that," he added.

Japanese dancer Yasuda Yuka, 34, said the atrocities were beyond her imagination.

"I am angry and sad as there are few records in Japanese textbooks about this history. Many young Japanese don't know history well and many even think it's dangerous to come to China," she said.

Six of those abandoned who still live in China accompanied the group. Gao Fengqin, 74, was adopted after her father was killed in the war when she was 5, but she still couldn't go back to Japan, which does not recognize her identity. "I am looking forward to going back to hunt for my roots," she

said. "But forever, China is my home."