



MEDIA RELEASE

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Experts seek solutions to “access block” for emergency patients

The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) is bringing together key experts from around Australia for a summit this Friday 12 September to find effective solutions to the problems of overcrowding and access block facing our emergency departments (EDs).

Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon will be delivering the Summit's opening address and will be joining some of Australia's eminent emergency medicine specialists, senior health system managers and academics to address solutions to the growing problem of delayed access to emergency treatment.

Access block, resulting in ED overcrowding is regarded as the single biggest threat to the delivery of quality emergency care in Australia. The main cause of access block is a combination of an increase in emergency presentations and admissions alongside the need for more in-patient hospital beds.

ACEM Vice-President Dr Sally McCarthy is optimistic about the intensive one-day Summit, “This is a great opportunity to bring the key people together - health care professionals, policy makers and politicians - to identify how we can work together to better tackle growing ED overcrowding and access block. We plan to get to the bottom line on what is working, what is not and new approaches we need to explore.”

College of Emergency Nursing Executive Director Julie Finucane will be attending and said, “As access block now affects most emergency departments in Australia, it is vital this Summit addresses the issues and the way forward. As patients queue in corridors awaiting transfer to inpatient beds it is distressing for them, their relatives, and the staff who care for them.

“It is of particular concern to emergency nurses around the country as they juggle care for these inpatients while attending presenting emergency patients. Development of effective strategies to tackle these issues is a real priority for us.”

The Summit will also see the launch of “Access block and overcrowding: A literature review” prepared by the Simpson Centre for Health Services Research, South Western Sydney Clinical School, University of New South Wales.

The literature review highlights findings across earlier studies that more hospital beds are required to meet demand and that access block can lead to increased risk of mortality. One of the key recommendations is for cohesive leadership from all levels of government, professional associations and academia on the issue.

Summit Details:

When: 9.00 am – 5.00 pm
Friday 12 September, 2008

Where: Hilton on the Park, 192 Wellington Parade, East Melbourne

Note: Access block is the term that describes the delay patients who need hospital admission experience in the Emergency Department (ED) when their inpatient bed is unavailable and occurs once that delay exceeds 8 hours. While no degree of access block is considered acceptable, research has revealed the functionality of an emergency department degrades once access block exceeds 10% of patients awaiting admission.

Further Information:

Media interested to attend and cover the Summit, seeking interviews and background information please contact Rhylla Morgan on 0409 090 294.

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