Medevac law saves lives

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) and Doctors for Refugees (D4R) have joined the voices of peak health organisations around Australia to urge the government not to repeal the Medevac legislation.

“The law is working to save lives,” said Dr Barri Phatarfod, President of Doctors for Refugees.

“It does not impact on refugee determinations or any immigration decisions. It simply allows people to receive the care they need.”

Twelve people died in the offshore detention system before this law was introduced, with treatment delay being cited as a factor by the Queensland Coroner Terry Ryan last year.

Since the law was passed there have been no deaths and instead an orderly system has seen the transfer of critically ill refugees to Australia to receive treatment.

“The Medevac legislation provides a clear, formal process with the government’s establishment of an expert panel of clinicians with the power to review all decisions. The Minister has the discretion to intervene at every step,” Dr Phatarfod said.

Mr Terry Slevin, CEO of PHAA said “Doctors should be the ones deciding health management, not politicians. Australians rightly have confidence in the judgement of our health professionals; we should let them get on with their job.”

The current arrangements came into effect earlier this year to reduce the risk of prolonged, unnecessary delays in providing urgent medical care.

“We previously saw countless cases of delay causing real medical harm,” said Dr Phatarfod.

“A young girl was in a coma from encephalitis, while a man waited weeks with ruptured abdominal organs before he was transferred for extensive surgery. No-one wants to see more deaths.”

Mr Slevin said, “The Medevac law also eliminates the costly court cases which are initiated by the government when the doctors on-site recommended a patient’s urgent transfer. And every time the court found in favour of the patient. This is an unconscionable and ultimately futile misuse of our resources.”

ENDS

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