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Dalwood remodelling to hinder children's progress: Doctors

Doctors have said the closure of Dalwood Assessment Centre, which includes a residential program, may hinder the health and education outcomes of children in rural and regional NSW who depend on the service and possess significant learning difficulties, AMA (NSW) said today.

"This is a unique centre, and provides primary age children with severe learning difficulties in literacy and associated difficulties in language or behaviour with specialist services, including access to a team of medical professionals and teachers," AMA (NSW) Councillor, Dr Aniello Iannuzzi said.

"But last month, Premier, Nathan Rees told NSW Parliament the service was being remodelled and amalgamated with the Children's Hospital Education Research Institute in Westmead to deliver better health and education outcomes for rural and remote students. The Premier said the remodelled service would take advantage of new technology available in schools to make it more accessible to isolated students, particularly Aboriginal children," he said.

Dr Iannuzzi said he was worried about how a non-residential service, located at Westmead Hospital is going to be more accessible to students including Aboriginal children in rural and regional areas, how the use of technology, reportedly smart boards, are going to assist children with severe learning difficulties to gain language and literacy outcomes and whether the children and in particular the schools actually have the technology available.

"The Government is basing the remodelling on these factors, but it remains to be seen how this new service will deliver better health and education outcomes when there are key concerns around how it is going to be achieved and tailored around the needs of children with learning difficulties who live in regional and remote areas," Dr Iannuzzi said.

"Dalwood works because of its collaborative team based approach and we are concerned about how the medical team, including a child psychologist, speech pathologist and doctor will continue to assess these children and collaborate with staff to continue the positive outcomes they have gained so far.

"These children need human interaction and as doctors, we need to be able to assess and monitor their progress in person. Parents are concerned the remodel has been neither researched or proven as being effective for teaching children with learning difficulties and without the face to face contact, we are weary of how better health and educational outcomes are going to be achieved.

"Dalwood has provided children with significant and positive outcomes. Why remodel a service that is proven to be working and effective?"

"The remodelling has been done without any consultation with staff or parents. AMA (NSW) calls on the NSW Ministers for Health and Education respectively to halt the closure of Dalwood for 12 months until a review is complete and an agreeable model to both parents and staff is put in place," Dr Iannuzzi said.

Visit www.topqualitytoys.com.au/index.php?pr=Save_Dalwood_Ass_Cntre to sign the petition to save Dalwood Assessment Centre.

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