

*Open Letter to RACGP Members -
The Tasmanian Government White Paper and Changes to
Birthing Services at Mersey Hospital*

Dear Colleagues,

RACGP Tasmania have proactively sought and offered feedback into the formulation of both the Tasmanian Government Green Paper and the finalised White Paper. With immediate past chair, David Knowles, on the government constituted Health Council of Tasmania, the profile of General Practice within the state health auspice has seldom been higher than it is at the moment.

On the back of this increased profile your faculty manager, Matt Rush, and myself, met with Minister Ferguson and his adviser, Dr Scott McKeown, and, during discussions about increasing efficiency in communications between the primary and tertiary sectors, the change to birthing services at Mersey Hospital was raised. The Minister was keen for information to go to the GPs in the Mersey Hospital catchment area and asked if the RACGP might offer some assistance in facilitating appropriate communications.

To this end I am writing, on behalf of the RACGP Tasmania Board, to provide you with some points that may assist you over the coming months. The change to services at the Mersey, which take effect from July 1st 2016, will affect those patients presenting to you in the early first trimester from now. The change, as outlined in the white paper, a copy of which I have attached, affects birthing services at Mersey only. All antenatal and postnatal care will continue to be offered at Mersey. Additionally, our research on this change suggests that no GP members will be affected by the change, as birthing services are not supported by GP Obstetricians at Mersey currently. The change does, however open an opportunity for GPs in the catchment area to offer GP Antenatal Shared Care services and we have asked the Minister to keep this top of mind. GPs can and have in the past offered a comprehensive, safe and evidence based, best practice approach to antenatal care and this can support your patients in the Mersey Hospital catchment area once again, returning the patient's GP to the centre of her care during this time. The distance from Latrobe to Burnie is 56km. While this clearly increased travel times and cost for patients in the Devonport/Latrobe area, it is necessary to improve birthing services across the North West Coast and, on the basis of evidence, does not compromise safety for expecting mothers or their babies.

Yours Sincerely,

Bastian Seidel
RACGP Tasmania- Chair

Linda Clow
RACGP Tasmania- Deputy Chair