

Reception for the Presentation of  
Administrator's Medals in Primary Health Care  
SPEECH on behalf of His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC  
Administrator of the Northern Territory  
Government House –1 May 2009

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Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Government House. His Honour is with us this evening, but his voice is not. He is suffering from laryngitis, (I'm tempted to ask whether there's a doctor in the house?) – therefore I shall share his message to you on his behalf. Firstly, I acknowledge the Larrakia people and their ancestors, traditional owners of the land on which this house stands.

There is a sickness, a darkness that afflicts many – the prominent and the marginalised, the farmer and the teenager. Concern about this sickness is whispered at hearings, behind closed doors in our medical clinics and between bereaved family members. It is the sickness of suicide.

Standing here today amongst friends and colleagues, and as the glorious dry season approaches, it is extremely hard to comprehend the deep hole of depression that can confront our fellow citizens. But our health professionals have to confront every aspect of primary health care in the Northern Territory and this dark secret is amongst the contemporary issues.

Other challenges that face our community present us with a range of figures that defy comprehension. For example: *The number of anaemic children has almost trebled in two years; dental neglect has been identified as the most widespread health problem among Aboriginal youngsters in remote communities.*

And at the other end of the age spectrum, the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2003 estimated that nationwide there were nearly half a million carers for people because of disability or age and this number is growing because of the ageing of the population. Being a carer often inflicts its own overwhelming pressures that affect health.

On another front, The Australian Drug Foundation Forum held in Melbourne in February reported: *Most people would identify "drug problems" with illicit drugs, such as cannabis, heroin .... and ecstasy, maybe even alcohol. Few*

*people would think about the misuse of pharmaceutical drugs. However, there are a number of prescribed or over-the-counter medicines that have the potential to be misused. Many pain relievers combine an anti inflammatory with codeine. A dependence on codeine leads to an associated increase in the dose of anti inflammatory taken which can, in turn, result in stomach bleeds.*

All these issues and many more are the reasons our medical clinics are a vital component of health care. The staff know their patients and as one nominee noted: *each doctor we have seen works with the previous doctor (if not the same one) to ensure any new prescriptions fit in with previous ones.*

Community health centres and primary health givers have a holistic approach and nothing surpasses the benefit to our communities from an outstanding team and committed individuals who provide and advance primary health care, initiate development programs and share wisdom in our city, rural and remote areas.

I wish you well with this weekend's Conference. I note that it is entitled *Good better best – achieving excellence in primary health care* which is exactly what today's awardees have accomplished. It reminds me of the motto: *good, better, best; never let it rest till your good is better and your better is best.* In fact, I'll conclude with a perfect quote for primary health carers made by the famous American, Henry Ford, *Don't find fault. Find a remedy.*

It is a great pleasure to now formally recognise the contribution of primary health care givers through the award of the 2009 Administrator's Medals. The Individual Medal in Primary Health Care goes to Valmai McDonald and the Team Medal in Primary Health Care goes to Nauiyu Health Centre