

**Rural Doctors  
Association  
of Queensland**  
*“Caring for the  
Country”*

**Media  
Release**

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***Missed chances risk “ghost hospital” for Roma***

President of the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland, Dr Sheilagh Cronin today warned that Roma Hospital would be left like a medical “ghost ship” if local managers continued to miss opportunities to attract and retain key medical staff.

**“We understand that all but one of Roma’s senior medical officers (SMOs) are pursuing better options and the medical superintendent has been left standing alone,” Dr Cronin said. “Roma Hospital needs around seven SMOs aboard. With only one, it might as well be scuttled. There’s a window of a week or so to salvage this wreck.”**

**“Setting these doctors adrift might help the South West Health Service District meet its budget bottom line because they won’t be spending much money treating patients. But for the community it will be disastrous and it risks lives,” she said.**

“There have apparently been a string of issues: dodgy mobile phones and no landlines to back up, refusal to accommodate pets, offering senior skilled doctors lower pay scales, and failing to help with spouses’ employment options,” Dr Cronin said. “We believe that doctors aren’t being adequately supported and are even feeling unfairly criticised when crises happen. None of this is trivial. The consistent feature is that the District administration isn’t managing the medical workforce with autonomy, flexibility or sensitivity.”

The current crisis would be bad enough but RDAQ believes that rare opportunities to secure skilled staff have been passed over by District management more than once in the past.

“We are aware of cases where doctors who have advanced skills in anaesthetics or obstetrics have thought about working in Roma but have gone elsewhere,” Dr Cronin said. “The effects are the same: country patients miss out again and again.”

“If District managers pass up an opportunity to bag themselves a skilled doctor, they compromise patients’ safety and make the hospitals less sustainable in the longer term,” she said. “We’re unaware of any part of country Queensland that ever got caught with too many doctors, but that seems to be what some managers are afraid of.”

“There’s a solution to all this but it involves flexibility that public-sector bureaucrats dread,” Dr Cronin said. “We recommend that the Director-General have an ‘opportunity fund’ or quarantined budget that Districts can access when someone comes along who’s too good to miss out on.”

“Along with an ‘opportunity fund’ there needs to be a hotline to the D-Gs office so that Districts can get a quick answer on these matters.

**“It’s a competitive medical marketplace out there and the manager who hesitates is lost – along with the communities they’re supposed to serve. Let’s not see the people of Roma, or anywhere else in country Queensland, miss out again.”**

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