Special Commission of Inquiry

into Healthcare Funding

Before: The Commissioner, Mr Richard Beasley SC

At Level 2, 121 Macquarie Street, Sydney, New South Wales

Wednesday, 16 October 2024 at 12 noon

(Day 056)

Mr Ed Muston SC	(Senior Counsel Assisting)
Mr Ross Glover	(Counsel Assisting)
Dr Tamsin Waterhouse	(Counsel Assisting)
Mr Ian Fraser	(Counsel Assisting)
Mr Daniel Fuller	(Counsel Assisting)

Also present:

Mr Richard Cheney SC with Mr Hilbert Chiu SC and Ms Emily Aitken for NSW Health

Mr Scott Chapman for Dr Michael Bonning

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THE COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon. 1 2 The first panel of witnesses we have today are 3 MR MUSTON: 4 both from Advanced Pharmacy Australia. 5 6 A copy of the statement that they have prepared, Commissioner, you will find behind tab L13, it is 7 8 exhibit L13. 9 THE COMMISSIONER: 10 I have that, thanks. 11 MR MUSTON: 12 Starting on your left is Jerry Yik, and next to him is Jonathan Penm. I think Mr Yik will take an 13 affirmation and Mr Penm will take an oath. 14 15 <JERRY YIK, affirmed:</pre> [12.01pm] 16 17 18 <JONATHAN PENM, sworn:</pre> 19 20 Starting with you, Mr Yik, would you state MR MUSTON: 21 your full name for the record, please. 22 23 MR YIK: Yes, my name is Mr Jerry Yik. 24 25 MR MUSTON: You are the head of policy and advocacy at Advanced Pharmacy Australia? 26 27 28 MR YIK: That's correct. 29 MR MUSTON: Mr Penm, could you state your full name for 30 the record, please. 31 32 33 DR PENM: Yes, I'm Jonathan Penm. 34 MR MUSTON: You are the vice chair of the New South Wales 35 branch committee of Advanced Pharmacy Australia? 36 37 DR PENM: Correct. 38 39 40 MR MUSTON: Also a member of the faculty pharmacy of the 41 University of Sydney. 42 THE COMMISSIONER: Is it Dr Penm? 43 44 45 DR PENM: Yes. 46 MR MUSTON: Dr Penm. 47

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1 2 You have both prepared a statement dated 26 September 3 2024 to assist the Inquiry with its work. Do you have 4 a copy of that with you? 5 MR YIK: 6 I do, yes. 7 8 DR PENM: Yes. 9 10 MR MUSTON: Have you each had an opportunity to review it before giving your evidence today? 11 12 Yes. 13 MR YIK: 14 DR PENM: We have. 15 16 17 MR MUSTON: Are you satisfied, to the best of your 18 knowledge, that its contents are true and correct? 19 20 MR YIK: Yes. 21 22 DR PENM: Yes. 23 24 MR MUSTON: That will form part of the tender in due 25 course. 26 27 THE COMMISSIONER: Yes. 28 29 MR MUSTON: Can I take you to page 4 of your statement where you set out for us a number of key issues. 30 In fact before going to that, could I ask you for the benefit of we 31 32 laypeople just to explain the typical role of a hospital 33 pharmacist within a public hospital setting? 34 MR YIK: 35 Yes, sure. Hospital pharmacists are very, very 36 important to the supply of medicines to patients in hospitals, all the way from the - upon entry into hospital, 37 where we might be in the emergency department, all the way 38 through to your entire inpatient journey, upon discharge 39 40 from hospital, and then as well as any community care that 41 might be provided or any transitions of care services that 42 might be provided as well. 43 44 Now, supply of medicines is a core part of what 45 pharmacists do. As we all might be very familiar with, we 46 tend to see pharmacists as the people that give us our 47 medicines. That is very, very true and that is a very

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1 important task where various checks are required to make 2 sure that you've got the right patient, the right medicine, 3 the right dosage, the right route of administration, so 4 that nothing goes wrong with the medicine that you take. 5 6 Pausing there, to the extent that we might all MR MUSTON: understand if you are an outpatient or an inpatient within 7 8 a hospital and a doctor prescribes a particular medication, 9 the hospital pharmacist will receive that prescription, 10 probably electronically these days, and collect and administer - distribute whatever the product is? 11 12 13 MR YIK: Yes, that's right. What you have described there 14 is a fairly reactive model, so the pharmacist is at the very end reviewing everything, and what - but in the acute 15 16 setting, what is best practice, as described in our 17 standards, is that you actually have pharmacists embedded in the wards providing bedside medication management 18 19 services where you can actually review the medication 20 chart, make sure that the prescribing or charting of that 21 medicine is safe and appropriate for the patient before the 22 nurse then orders that medicine. 23 24 The pharmacist should be involved in that prescribing 25 and charting process alongside the doctor so that even 26 before it makes it down to the dispensary for the pharmacist to supply it, it's already been deemed to be 27 28 a safe and appropriate prescription for that patient. So that is probably the more clinical and cognitive service 29 that should be provided and what hospital pharmacists 30 31 should be able to provide, and which is, you know, an 32 extremely value-adding area. 33 34 MR MUSTON: Going back to the point of admission, we've heard some evidence and heard some discussion on some of 35 36 our regional trips about medication reconciliation as 37 a role that pharmacists have within a hospital setting. Could you just explain to us, say from the perspective of 38 a hypothetical patient who enters the hospital system, what 39 40 that involves? 41 I think yes, medication reconciliation is 42 MR YIK: Yes. 43 an activity that requires pharmacists to undertake 44 a history of what medicines that patient is on prior to 45 entering hospital, so that when they are admitted, they can 46 have all their regular medicines from home being charted and/or their reason for admission to hospital might be 47

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1 medication related as well. So this has actually been, you 2 know, a subject across various inquiries in New South 3 Wales, but a typical patient in a hospital might take 4 anywhere from 2 to 5 to 10 medicines depending upon the 5 patient profile. In that medicine profile there might be 6 some medicines that are very, very appropriate for the 7 patient but, at some point, there might have been an 8 unintentional overdose, there might have been a doubling up 9 of some medicines because a patient hasn't had a review for 10 a while.

So they might come into hospital and be taking the wrong medicines and the pharmacist who does the medication reconciliation can find that out. But even if there's nothing wrong with the patient's medicines, there is still a duty of the hospital to make sure the patient is taking the medicines that they were on prior to home.

19 So if you're a patient that's using something to lower 20 your blood pressure, something to lower your cholesterol, 21 taking an anti-depressant, some pain medicines as well, you 22 should expect that in your five-day inpatient stay, that you should have access to those medicines as well and 23 24 continue that therapy. You shouldn't have to stop taking 25 those medicines for five or six days while you are in 26 hospital. And to make sure that pharmacists and the 27 hospital can provide the right medicines, that's where that 28 medication reconciliation occurs, to make sure that we are 29 taking an accurate medication history, because if it's not done, then the patient goes without medicines or, worse, 30 31 might be prescribed the wrong medicines.

MR MUSTON: When you say "prescribed the wrong medicines", do you mean prescribed something which is inconsistent with or reacts adversely with something that the patient is or has been taking?

So it could be they are prescribed the wrong 38 MR YIK: medicine or the wrong dosage compared to what they were on 39 40 at home and, yes, it has potential to be one that they 41 might have an adverse reaction to. Why that might occur 42 sometimes is if you don't have a pharmacist doing the 43 medication reconciliation - and evidence proves and 44 suggests that pharmacists are the best clinicians to do 45 a medication history for medication reconciliation - where 46 you rely upon a doctor or a nurse who has a lot of other things to do to take a really basic medication 47

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- reconciliation that's not comprehensive and may not be
  entirely accurate, then charting and prescribing decisions
  made on those types of medication reconciliation activities
  by nurses and doctors can lead to some discrepancies and
  errors.
  - So without a pharmacist doing a really comprehensive and accurate medication reconciliation, that's what might precipitate the issues that you have described.
- MR MUSTON: You refer to a "comprehensive and accurate
   reconciliation". What, in a practical sense, does that
   involve beyond asking a patient to the extent that they are
   capable of responding, "What are you taking"?
- 16 MR YIK: Many activities - and as you said, it's not just asking the patient and as we know unfortunately patients, 17 18 certainly when they are in the acute environment, can be 19 poor historians. So we have to make sure we are checking 20 That could include the My Health Record; other sources. 21 could be calling up their usual community pharmacies as 22 well to look for dispensing records, and that might - and 23 some patients might have more than one pharmacy, which 24 makes it more complicated; contacting their prescribers as 25 well, so their GP or GP practice; any specialists as well 26 that they might have; carers as well. Yes, so there is 27 a variety of sources that we can use to get that accurate 28 medication history and often we do need to do that. But as you can imagine, that's quite a significant amount of time 29 to do an accurate and comprehensive medication history that 30 31 you just would not expect a nurse or a doctor to do.
- MR MUSTON: That would obviously require a sufficient workforce within a pharmacy department to be performing that task in relation to patients as they come in to the facility.

Yes, absolutely. You require pharmacists to be 38 MR YIK: staffed on all those wards, especially in general medicine 39 40 wards, in emergency medicine where you are getting the high 41 flow of patients, to do that medication history. Unfortunately, there are many, many, I would probably say 42 43 the vast majority of New South Wales hospital pharmacy 44 departments and their wards won't have a continual and regular clinical pharmacist service at those wards. 45 46

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MR MUSTON: In relation to that reconciliation process,

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1 would it be right to assume that there's a spectrum in 2 terms of the rigour that one needs to apply to that task 3 depending on the nature of the patient and the reason for 4 their presentation? So, for example, if a fit and well 5 patient turned up to have some stitches put in to a gash on 6 their arm and was going to be prescribed some painkillers 7 to go away from the emergency department with, you would 8 probably not need to be quite as rigorous in terms of your 9 reconciliation, as, for example, an aged care facility 10 patient who comes in with a mystery bag of foil tablets 11 and --12

13 MR YIK: Yes, absolutely. I think we always obviously 14 apply risk assessments and we provide our services on a risk-based approach, so looking at patient profiles, and 15 16 that could be age-related factors, can be their medical 17 history, can be the number of medicines that they are on. 18 It can be the types of medicines that they are on. There 19 are many patients who are taking 15, 20 medicines, and they 20 can be completely appropriate, but you might have patients 21 who are only taking five and they are all inappropriate or 22 can have the propensity to cause an adverse reaction. 23

So we aim to provide medication review to every single patient. There is no way that is occurring in New South Wales based on the funding issues that we've explored, and even applying a risk-based approach and even trying to ensure that we only review our high-risk patients, even that service level is not able to be met in New South Wales in many, many departments.

MR MUSTON: When you say it is not able to be met for funding reasons, are you essentially telling us that there are insufficient hospital pharmacists employed within facilities to enable that process to be undertaken with respect to the patients that, at least in the view of pharmacists, it ought to be undertaken in relation to?

MR YIK: Yes, I am. So as we present in our evidence, the
number of hospital pharmacists in New South Wales is - you
know, comparatively speaking to Victoria and Queensland,
when you're looking at the number of hospital pharmacists
to the number of hospital beds that you have, New South
Wales is far, far behind.

46 So in that scenario, how do we - how do New South 47 Wales pharmacy departments apportion their pharmacists and

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1 their workforce to the services that they have to provide? 2 Unfortunately, a lot of them can't put pharmacists on to 3 the wards providing those clinical and cognitive services 4 and preventing medication errors from occurring, preventing 5 prescribing errors from occurring. Where they are being forced to provide most of the services is at the very tail 6 end of - simply because we only have so many pharmacists, 7 8 we have to focus all our efforts on the supply of medicines 9 and it's only when they are asked to supply medicine, they 10 receive a prescription and we find out, "Hold on, there are errors here. Why has this been allowed to go on for X 11 number of days when it should have been detected at the 12 13 very beginning?"

Best practice dictates that you detect these errors at the very beginning, as other states are able to do because they do have enough workforce, but in New South Wales, in many areas, that error may only be detected at the very end when the pharmacist is asked to supply that medicine, if at all.

THE COMMISSIONER: The ratios that you have given in the table on page 2 - any questions I ask, and also this applies to Mr Muston, both of you should feel free to chip in and answer if you want to - why is New South Wales so much different to Victoria and Queensland? Funding might be one issue, but are there any other reasons that you're aware of?

MR YIK: Look, I think funding is a - it probably comes 30 31 down to funding, at the end of the day. I think there are 32 other areas around workforce investment as well, so there 33 is a workforce shortage across not just healthcare sectors 34 but every sector at the moment but historically, New South 35 Wales hospital pharmacy departments have been underfunded. 36 We aren't funding enough internships for pharmacy students 37 to come into the hospital setting. We know that hospital the hospital setting is the most desirable setting for 38 pharmacy students, but I think New South Wales currently 39 40 only offers 40-odd, according to our submission.

In Victoria, we've got over 100. So if you are only
getting 40 new interns each year and you want them to
continue, then you've got a fairly limited pool. So
I think funding is probably what it comes down to.
Recognition from the LHDs about what pharmacy departments
provide and the services that they provide and providing

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requisite funding, that's a conversation that we hear from
 various hospitals and pharmacy departments is - it's
 probably not taken seriously. So our pharmacy departments
 are asked to do --

6 THE COMMISSIONER: Sorry, what is not taken seriously?

8 A lot of our pharmacy departments are asked to do MR YIK: 9 a lot of extra activities to respond to the needs of the 10 state healthcare system. We're like, of course, we want to do that, we want to make sure that we're providing the best 11 care possible but when we then say, "Well, we're going to 12 13 need this amount of pharmacy technicians, this amount of 14 pharmacists", the response from various levels within the ministry or the LHD is that, "Well, sorry, we can't. 15 We 16 can't fund that. You're just going to have to make that 17 happen", and so that's when it comes to, "Well, what can we cut or what can we rearrange?" And I was speaking to 18 19 someone who was job was rearranged at some point during his 20 career due to these funding decisions.

22 DR PENM: I would just quickly add to it. We have lots of 23 people wanting to work in hospital. We just don't have 24 enough positions for them to have. And then those that are in there, the pay structure doesn't reward them for their 25 26 contribution. When you're talking about the restructuring, 27 we often get those requests that say this hospital is 28 implementing a new service, implementing more emergency 29 department beds, implementing more wards. They will tell us how amazing those new facilities are, the new doctors 30 31 they will hire for it, the new nurses they will hire for 32 But in the pharmacy, we go, "So, are we getting it. 33 anything?" "No". Pharmacy is generally not considered 34 when it comes to new services and we've just been taking that load on and on and on and we've just got to this point 35 36 now that our ratios just seem vastly lower than other 37 states.

By having the one to eight hospital bed 39 THE COMMISSIONER: 40 ratio in Victoria and Queensland as distinct from one to 13 41 in New South Wales metro and then the one to 18, one to 14 versus one to 27 for regional hospitals, what are the 42 43 consequences you think for having - in relation to the 44 different ratios? In other words, what different services 45 are able to be provided in the metro or regional hospitals 46 in Victoria or Queensland that can't be provided in New South Wales because of those ratios, and what risks are 47

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1 being mollified in those other states that aren't in 2 New South Wales because of those ratios? 3 4 MR YIK: As I described earlier, it probably comes down to the ability to provide clinical pharmacy services at the 5 6 ward. 7 8 THE COMMISSIONER: On the ward. 9 10 MR YIK: Yes, on the ward. So say you've got a junior doctor who wants to chart a medicine for a patient and they 11 want to find out, well, is this the correct dose given this 12 patient's renal function, where is a pharmacist to ask that 13 14 question? In other states, you will have a pharmacist who is there, that can provide that junior doctor some advice 15 16 In New South Wales, there isn't, and so that on that. 17 error or - is then detected at the end. 18 THE COMMISSIONER: 19 Potential error. 20 21 MR YIK: The potential error is then potentially detected 22 by the pharmacist at the very end, if they're asked to supply that medicine. 23 24 25 DR PENM: We do have some evidence for that on page 11 where we talk about the partnered pharmacist medication 26 27 charting model. That is a model that is implemented in the 28 other states because they have the pharmacists to deliver 29 that service. That's just an extension of what Mr Yik talked about with pharmacists --30 31 32 THE COMMISSIONER: Sorry, this is what you call the PPMC? 33 34 DR PENM: That's correct. So once the pharmacist does the medication reconciliation, the pharmacist then charts those 35 36 medications, because they have the time and the ability to 37 do so, and they have done the medication reconciliation because they have the staff to do so, and they show by 38 doing that they have now reduced that length of stay by 39 40 10 per cent, they have reduced the errors per patient by 41 62.4 per cent. That's a service that you can only do if 42 you have the staffing to do it. 43 44 THE COMMISSIONER: Sure. 45 46 That's a really good example again of where our MR YIK: pharmacy departments are being asked to do more but without 47

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1 the resources to do that. So that PPMC program, we gave 2 evidence on that at the ramping inquiry, and we're really grateful to the New South Wales Government for accepting 3 4 that recommendation and putting it into the report. 5 The status of that is the Ministry of Health is 6 7 progressing this program and they have put out - we 8 understand that they have put out an EOI to various 9 hospitals and LHDs to ask, "Who wants to participate?" 10 There is lots of interest from many, many LHDs but what we understand is they have also been told there won't be any 11 additional money to fund this service. 12 13 14 THE COMMISSIONER: So this is recommendation 8? 15 16 MR YIK: In the ramping inquiry? 17 18 THE COMMISSIONER: Yes. 19 20 MR YIK: Yes, that's right. 21 22 THE COMMISSIONER: We find that - do you have your whole statement? 23 24 MR YIK: 25 Yes, I do, yes. 26 THE COMMISSIONER: So this is the New South Wales 27 28 Government response to the ramping inquiry, just call it 29 that, page 5 --30 MR YIK: 31 So they've accepted that. 32 33 THE COMMISSIONER: -- that the New South Wales Government 34 will provide funding to increase the number of hospital pharmacists so that their availability better matches 35 36 operating hours, et cetera. That's supported in principle. 37 38 MR YIK: Yes, and we are still waiting for that But the PPMC is just one of many different, 39 investment. 40 you know, additional requirements or initiatives that we 41 all want to do for the benefits of New South Wales patients, but we keep being told continually that there is 42 43 no extra funding to provide that. 44 45 MR MUSTON: Just to pick up on something, Mr Yik, you said 46 a bit earlier, the position in many facilities is, if I've understood you correctly, that the pharmacy workforce that 47

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is employed is effectively detained full time keeping up
with the distribution of medication from the pharmacy
department in response to prescriptions that come down from
the wards.

MR YIK: 6 I would say so, that the core service of Yes. a pharmacist is to supply medicines and, you know, their 7 8 role in the hospitals is to make sure that patients receive 9 medicines. That's a really, really important part of what 10 But in an environment where we are meeting our own we do. professional standards, we are not just supplying 11 12 medicines, we are also making sure that the charting and 13 prescribing of those medicines is safe and appropriate 14 before it even reaches the pharmacy to dispense 15 a prescription.

17 So we should be detecting the errors or assessing it 18 for its appropriateness as early as possible, not at the 19 very end when we are in the basement, when we don't have 20 access to the nurse or the doctor to get things changed.

22 MR MUSTON: Just working through this hypothetical 23 patient, if we put to one side the workforce challenges and 24 assume the hypothetical patient appears at a hospital that 25 has a hypothetical workforce where pharmacists can provide 26 the best level of service you think they're able to 27 provide, it starts with a thorough reconciliation of their 28 existing medication. In relation to that, is that a task 29 that can usually be performed by a relatively junior pharmacist, not wanting to downplay the importance of it, 30 31 but --

MR YIK: Yes, absolutely. These are, you know, key
competencies for pharmacists and certainly undertaking
medication reconciliation, medication histories, is
something that we train students and interns to do as well
so that once they are registered, they are more than
competent to do that independently.

I might throw to Dr Penm, who actually trains students and interns who do these activities.

DR PENM: Yes, so we've got some data from Sydney University showing that pharmacy students, pharmacy interns, pharmacists, all of them are able to do it, and they do in a way that is more accurate than doctors and nurses. That's not to downplay their knowledge base; it

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just shows that we have a different focus when we do it and we are particularly conscious of things around strengths, formulations, things that we see every day, and we know that doctors and nurses have other things that they need to prioritise and they don't see. It's a core competency, something that the more junior workforce can do.

I will also just talk to your point about how do we provide that value. When we're doing these tasks, it's often obvious to us that if you solve the problem at the beginning, it saves a lot of problems at the end.

13 So when we had that reactive model Mr Yik was talking 14 about earlier, we were just identifying that a lot of the problems could have been sorted out much quicker, much 15 16 faster if a pharmacist was involved, which is why we have 17 become involved earlier, and that then speaks to the point on page 9 that every dollar spent on pharmacy comes to \$23 18 of savings, because the kinds of things we're fixing are 19 20 actually easy to be fixed at the beginning versus trying to 21 fix them at the end.

So working through that process, obviously 23 MR MUSTON: 24 money spent on a thorough reconciliation of someone's 25 medication has the potential to produce better or quicker 26 or at least less adverse outcomes, which has a financial 27 What is the next role for benefit attached to it. 28 a well-provisioned pharmacy department in terms of the journey of this hypothetical patient who has been admitted? 29 You have completed your reconciliation of their medication, 30 31 they're receiving some medical treatment or a medical 32 assessment is being made of them by a doctor - what's the 33 pharmacist's role there?

I guess inpatients is probably the next, you 35 MR YIK: know, journey for that patient, and so as an inpatient, 36 depending on what you are diagnosed with, it could be - you 37 are likely to be prescribed some new medicines, they could 38 be - just say you have got an infection that is really 39 40 resistant to a lot of anti-microbials, so even choosing the 41 right anti-microbial, making sure that's at the right dose for you, that any all your issues - that any adverse 42 43 affects are addressed and detected appropriately as well, 44 interpreting your cultures and sensitivity testings to 45 guide anti-microbial selection, looking at your renal and 46 hepatic function as well to inform the dosing of that medicine, making sure that medicine is compounded correctly 47

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1 2 3 4	as well by the pharmacy department, and making sure the nurse knows how to administer that medicine appropriately, whether that be by infusion or injection, because again, even the administration can cause issues as well.
5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	So I guess there's a lot of - for that inpatient, it's any changes to their medicines, be it a new medication being charted, an old medicine being ceased or withdrawn because that's causing harm or has the propensity to cause harm, and any other additional medicines to treat side effects, such as nausea, vomiting, pain - all these things require a pharmacist to review daily and to inform the charting and prescribing of those medicines as well.
14 15 16 17 18	MR MUSTON: And so that presumably is a role that would be done collaboratively with the doctor who is treating the patient?
19 20	MR YIK: That's right.
21 22 23	MR MUSTON: What is the extra that the pharmacist brings to that collaboration that one might not ordinarily expect of a doctor who is treating the patient?
24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33	MR YIK: So there is a lot of - because the patient's health and their status in the acute setting is changing continually, it does require extra focus on the medicines to make sure that those medicines and the dosages are appropriate for the patient, because the next day your patient might be having acute renal failure and that would require review of all the medicines to make sure that those medicines aren't going to make that worse.
34 35 36 37 38 39	We also recognise that a lot of the prescribing and charting in the hospital setting is done by junior doctors who are less experienced with charting and prescribing of medicines as well, and so having a pharmacist who is a bit more experienced around the medicines can really improve the quality and accuracy of prescribing as well.
40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47	Charting of medicines on a medication chart, it's not just writing down the drug and the dose. There are also other - that you're getting the mode of administration right, any variable dosing issues as well, having to get that right as well. Annotating, you know, making sure any medication orders that might need to be withheld because a patient has a procedure the next day or in the next two

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days. I guess there's a lot more - the patients aren't in a stable setting, their health status isn't stable, and so there's a lot of factors that go into the safe and quality prescribing of medicines that requires a lot more attention than, say, when you do have a stable patient in a community setting.

8 DR PENM: I'll just add, there are at least two other main 9 things to focus on where pharmacists do provide value. 0ne 10 is we do a lot more training on medications. Our knowledge of medications is vaster because of that, but we have 11 12 a very generalist view. So, for instance, say 13 a cardiologist - cardiologists will know all their 14 cardiology medications very well, but they might not know the psychiatric medicines as well. A pharmacist will be 15 16 aware that, "Actually, that has a lot of side effects, so 17 they need to be monitored; they interact." So it is 18 a really good partnership. Doctors will know what is best 19 to treat them in front of them, and we know whether it does 20 actually fit within the context of the patient, from that 21 broader perspective. That's often the types of issues that 22 we identify - drug interactions that we identify - earlier 23 on.

25 Another part of it is just that pharmacy sees things. 26 We really like the detail. We love about - the doses matter to us. The formulations really, really matter, 27 28 getting the right dose for a patient with renal impairment, 29 that gets us excited. We want to make sure they get the right dose, and that's often not the things that get 30 31 doctors excited. They have a lot of other things that get 32 them excited and they can do it, they're capable of doing 33 it, but they're just not high priority tasks and they get 34 skipped, they get missed.

36 That's where the errors happen because it is hard to do tasks that you don't like to do. I know that's 37 a generalisation, but generally, pharmacy really enjoys 38 making medication safety a priority, we really like to do 39 40 that, we do it well because of that. So it's just a really 41 good partnership, and that is constantly seen when we ask 42 doctors, "Do you like having a pharmacist?" They go, "We love it, they do the stuff I don't want to do and they do 43 44 it well." And pharmacy go, "And we love doing it". So to 45 just not have that combination, it seems like you're just 46 missing out.

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1 MR YIK: And to make sure we are not putting our doctors 2 in disrepute, it is not that they don't like doing it --3 4 THE COMMISSIONER: I didn't assume that. 5 MR YIK: But it's also they --6 7 8 THE COMMISSIONER: The lack of excitement only means that 9 they're happy for you to do it. 10 11 MR YIK: They don't have the time to do it as well. They 12 also just don't have the time to do it as well. A lot of junior doctors, certainly from other states, they have been 13 14 brought up in a system where they do have a pharmacist that does a lot of these things for them and then they come to 15 New South Wales and go, "Where is the pharmacist?" 16 17 I think the PPMC model that we talked about 18 DR PENM: 19 earlier highlights that, that all the medical profession 20 really enjoy us doing that task. They actually say "This 21 is great". 22 You tell us a little bit in your statement 23 MR MUSTON: about the advanced skills training for pharmacists in the 24 various different strands of advanced skills that 25 pharmacists can pursue. Presumably where a pharmacist has 26 27 obtained some advanced skill training and experience in a 28 particular area, whether it be, you know, chemotherapy 29 medication or any of the other wide array of advanced skills that you have identified by reference to those nice 30 31 little icons in your statement, that pharmacist will be 32 able to bring a particular degree of skill and experience 33 to the table when dealing with issues like this, and perhaps significantly more than a junior doctor, who is 34 35 just starting on their professional journey. 36 Yes, absolutely. I think what Dr Penm's talked 37 MR YIK: about, us being specialists but also generalists, is 38 a really good example, because say you're in a psychiatry 39 40 ward, you've got the psychiatry consultant and the 41 registrar, who might be really laser focused on the psychiatry medicines, and rightly they should be, but the 42 pharmacist will also take that holistic view and look at, 43 44 well, how does it impact their medicines for their 45 cholesterol, how does it impact their medicines for their 46 blood pressure? 47

1 These are all important factors for us to all 2 consider, so the pharmacist will take that viewpoint in 3 there. I think you are right about the need for advanced 4 skills and specialisation as well. What we do know with 5 health care is that patients are coming into hospital more unwell, more advanced in their disease state and so that 6 7 also then requires your practitioners, including your 8 pharmacists, to make sure that they have the right skills 9 to provide care for these patients. So we do try to 10 specialise pharmacists where we can. If you've got an 11 oncology ward in New South Wales or a psychiatry ward in 12 New South Wales, you don't just put every pharmacist sorry, any pharmacist in that ward; you want to make sure 13 14 that the pharmacist you're putting into that ward already 15 has the skills in oncology, in psychiatry, so that they're 16 providing the best and safest and highest quality health 17 care to that patient wherever possible. That's not being done at the moment in many parts of New South Wales, but 18 19 it's certainly what patients should be expecting from us. 20 21 MR MUSTON: So in terms of those forms of advanced 22 training, in smaller regional and rural facilities which 23 offer a general array of services to their patients, 24 obviously whilst a pharmacist might choose to pursue some advanced training, the real skill that they bring to bear 25 26 in that setting is going to be that slightly more general 27 skill set; would that be right? 28 29 MR YIK: Yes, that's right. I think there are some you'll have general pharmacists and general medicine 30

you'll have general pharmacists and general medicine pharmacists in all hospitals, whether it be rural, regional or metropolitan areas, but I think that there is going to be more and more demands from patients to have specialist services outside of metropolitan areas.

Around the country, there is a need for this as well. We are ready, our workforce, to provide the services through different models of care. So be that outreach or telehealth or remote services, these can be provided and these will only proliferate even more in the coming years.

42 MR MUSTON: Just in relation to that, dealing, for 43 example, with cancer treatment and the delivery of 44 chemotherapy to people closer to where they live, is there 45 scope for a well-provisioned pharmacy workforce to enhance 46 in any way the ability to deliver, in perhaps more regional 47 and remote settings, treatment of that type to patients

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where you might not actually have an on-the-ground
 workforce that's well experienced and skilled in the
 delivery of that type of care, the chemotherapy kind of
 care?

MR YIK: Look, that is progressing and that has been rolled out, certainly in WA for a telehealth chemotherapy service. In New South Wales there is the Virtual Clinical Pharmacy Service, or VCPS, that has actually won a few awards, where they are providing pharmacy services to patients electronically and via telehealth.

13 At the outset, it is important for us to state that 14 in-person services are of the highest quality, but because of the workforce shortage, a lot of hospitals have been 15 16 forced to look at providing services digitally and via 17 telehealth means, and that has bridged a massive access gap 18 in access to pharmacists, pharmacist services, the Med Rec 19 counselling by a pharmacist, where it otherwise would 20 simply just not have been provided at all due to funding or 21 due to not having a pharmacist living in the area. So 22 these means have now bridged that gap and some of these 23 cancer services, you now can actually have an oncology pharmacist speak to a cancer patient, look at the 24 25 medication chart, making sure that that oncology medicine is charted appropriately, it's the right dose, it's 26 calculated appropriately, before it's then compounded and 27 28 administered to the patient.

MR MUSTON: Continuing to walk through this hypothetical 30 31 patient's journey, decisions around prescribing are dealt 32 with collaboratively in an ideal situation, charting is 33 then done by a pharmacist in the ideal situation. Pausing 34 there, I'm assuming that having regard to the competing pressures on doctors' times, that, to be blunt, having 35 36 a pharmacist deal with things like the charting is a more cost effective way of dealing with that problem from the 37 system's point of view, than having the doctor do that? 38 Would that be a fair assumption? 39

41 DR PENM: It's not just cost effective; it's more accurate 42 and safer.

44 MR MUSTON: Better in almost every respect?

46 DR PENM: Best practice.

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The evidence that we've provided, it's been 1 MR YIK: 2 evaluated multiple times and it's been shown to reduce the 3 admission length because the administering is more 4 There's dramatic reduction in the errors as accurate. 5 well, and the qualitative feedback that we've got from doctors, from a variety of states, is that they have more 6 7 time to spend with patients and to do other things. So 8 where you have a pharmacist taking over a lot of that 9 charting, it just - it's quite a big relief to a lot of the 10 doctors involved. 11 12 MR MUSTON: In this hypothetical well-resourced facility where the patient is discharged, what's the pharmacist's 13 14 role at the point of discharge if they have one? 15 16 DR PENM: Yes, so we know discharge and transitions of 17 care is a high-risk scenario. A lot of medication-related harm happens at transitions of care, and some of these 18 19 patients come back to hospital. That happens for a variety of reasons: one, it's not just the clinical decisions that 20 21 are being made, what's best for them, but there's a lot of 22 coordination to make sure that the primary care, both physician and community pharmacy, are aware of what's 23 24 happening and that those medicines are actually available 25 outside and they can do it in a timely manner. 26 27 Within New South Wales, we're not part of the 28 pharmaceutical benefits reform and so we don't have access 29 to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medication quantities that all the other states in Australia do, so we generally 30 31 discharge patients with about five to seven days' worth, 32 and that means that they've got to see their GP in that 33 short amount of time to get more medicines, otherwise they 34 just go without until they do. That's part of it. 35 36 We've got the clinical decisions, that the right medicines are prescribed, the labs have all been monitored, 37 they're not getting side effects from those, they're 38 getting the right response. 39 40 41 Then we've got to coordinate that everyone knows what they should be on, including the patient. 42 That often -43 well, not often but can sometimes be missed, and then that 44 comes with patient education, counselling, producing 45 patient medication lists, so it's also written down, 46 because we know, no matter how much I tell you, you're not going to remember everything, and that applies to all of 47 .16/10/2024 (056) 5781 PHARMACY PANEL

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1 us. 2 3 It just takes time to do all of those things, and 4 without pharmacists, it doesn't happen. That's why 5 transitions of care is such a high-risk area, it is considered a priority area, the Australian Commission have 6 7 already said it's a priority area because it's continually 8 failing our patients in that space. 9 10 MR MUSTON: Do I infer from what you said a moment ago --11 THE COMMISSIONER: 12 Sorry, the Australian Commission is? 13 14 DR PENM: Quality of care. 15 16 MR YIK: That's the Australian Commission on Quality and 17 Safety in Healthcare. 18 THE COMMISSIONER: 19 Thanks. 20 21 MR MUSTON: Do I infer from something you said a moment 22 ago that the risks associated with that discharge and transition period are exacerbated in New South Wales by the 23 24 fact that it's not a party to the PBS arrangements such 25 that there is necessarily going to be a very narrow window within which that transition has to happen and some other 26 27 external party will have to engage with whatever the 28 patient's walked away with and understand it sufficiently 29 to make sure that the medication that the patient should be taking continues in the way that it should continue? 30 31 32 MR YIK: Yes, that's right. So because New South Wales 33 and the ACT government aren't signatories to the 34 pharmaceutical reform agreements, they are unable to prescribe and therefore dispense one month's worth of 35 36 medicines or the PBS quantities worth of medicines to 37 patients on discharge. 38 That is something the New South Wales Government has 39 40 been wanting to do and has, I understand, made multiple 41 representations to the federal government to enact or to enter into an agreement, so my understanding is that the 42 43 ball is in the federal government's court. New South Wales 44 Government has adopted that policy or that position to want to have one, but I think it requires the federal government 45 46 to support that. 47

1 MR MUSTON: Putting to one side whatever financial 2 benefits or dis-benefits might be associated with entering 3 into an agreement like that, from a patient's point of view 4 and the patient safety point of view, giving that period of 5 a month within which --6 7 MR YIK: Very important. 8 9 MR MUSTON: -- follow-up care, primary care givers are 10 able to see a patient, assess their needs, understand and make inquiries about the medication, changes in medication 11 and new medications that might have been introduced, is 12 13 important. 14 Yes, absolutely. After an acute admission, you 15 MR YIK: 16 would have had quite a - you know, often for patients, it 17 is a major life event to go into hospital because you have 18 had a heart attack, you have had a stroke, and so those 19 first few days back at home you are recovering, you're 20 getting all your life administration all sorted. The last 21 thing you want to have to think about is, "I'm running out 22 of medicines in three or five days. Where do I get more?" 23 24 This issue is even more pronounced in areas where It's impossible to see a GP within 25 there are GP shortages. 26 seven days, so having the ability to have a month's worth 27 of medicines just gives you that extra time to settle back 28 at home, take the medicines that you need to have and not 29 miss any days, because if you are only being given seven days and you can't see your GP within those seven days, 30 31 well, what's going to happen? I think we all know this is 32 occurring, but this is the reality that we live in. 33 34 MR MUSTON: So in terms of that reality, you ask the 35 rhetorical question, what's going to happen? There would 36 seem to be two possible answers to that: one is you don't 37 take the medication that you need to be taking, which has potentially adverse consequences for the patient? 38 39 So you can have a readmission 40 MR YIK: Absolutely, yes. 41 if you're not taking the right medicine. 42 43 A really good example of this, where a patient missed 44 out on medicine at the transitions of care - so this isn't 45 really related too much to the pharmaceutical reform 46 agreement but again it goes to the broader issue around transitions of care and why you need pharmacists - four 47 .16/10/2024 (056) 5783 PHARMACY PANEL

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1 years ago New South Wales had an inquiry into the rural and 2 regional remote health based off a 60 Minutes story where 3 a patient was being transferred, I understand, from 4 a public to a private facility, and they were on a really 5 important medicine, apixaban, to prevent them from having another stroke. In that transitions of care there wasn't 6 7 a pharmacist providing a service, there wasn't a pharmacist 8 calling up the private hospital to say, "Hey, this patient 9 is on apixaban. Please make sure that they are going to 10 chart that medicine in the private hospital when we hand them over to your care so that they don't have another 11 stroke." That medicine was missed, I understand from the 12 report, by five to seven days and they then later had 13 14 a fatal stroke. 15

16 So it's these types of issues that are - we know that 17 they're going to occur before they even occur, because we 18 know this is what's going to occur. If someone has just 19 had a stroke, they've been put on these new medicines to 20 prevent them from having another stroke, it is so important 21 that they have access to these medicines. But without 22 a pharmacist at the discharge, at the transitions of care, 23 no-one is thinking about that. It is no fault against the 24 nurse or the doctor, but you need a pharmacist whose sole 25 focus is on those medicines to be the advocate for the 26 patient so that they have a safe transitions of care.

That issue, you know, without requisite investment into the pharmacy workforce, it's going to happen again. I don't know how else to say that, but it's going to happen again.

In the last four years since that report, where that inquiry originated from a medicine-related issue, still not much has really been done to support the funding of pharmacy departments to make sure that we do have pharmacists on discharge, at transitions of care, providing that cognitive and clinical pharmacy service.

40 MR MUSTON: Not taking the medication that they need is 41 one possible answer to your rhetorical question. The other 42 one is, if you can't get into your GP, you will re-present 43 at the hospital, presumably through emergency, to say, 44 "I haven't been able to get my medicine. Could you please 45 give me a script for a little bit more while I wait to see 46 the GP?"

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1 MR YIK: Yes, and I think that does occur, too. We have 2 been seeing more and more presentations to EDs because 3 patients don't have enough medicines, and that can be from, 4 as you've described, not being given enough on discharge. 5 There are also obviously other issues around medication 6 shortages at the moment as well that are also causing some 7 ED presentations as well.

9 MR MUSTON: So coming to some of the solutions, I think we 10 understand the importance of pharmacists within the 11 hospital setting and the potential challenges that you 12 identify if there are not sufficient of them from 13 a pathway - a pipeline point of view, but equally within 14 the workforce. The first is an increase - you propose an 15 increase in the number of pharmacy intern positions.

17 MR YIK: Yes.

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19 MR MUSTON: Perhaps, Dr Penm, you are best placed to 20 answer this, but could you just explain what is the 21 intern - what role does an internship play in the career 22 progression and education of a pharmacist, and what do you 23 think increasing hospital pharmacy intern positions would 24 do from a workforce point of view within New South Wales?

DR PENM: Yes. So once a pharmacy student completes their degree and has a registerable degree, every one of them needs to complete a one-year internship before they can practise independently. That comes with both supervised hours and an exam at the end. So that's every pharmacy student who has to do that.

At my own university, the University of Sydney, we have around 350 students coming out every year. As you can see, we only have 40 hospital internships, which is very small for the amount that's applying, that's that top 10 per cent, and we have data that 80 per cent of students want to go to a hospital.

40 If people don't get that initial entry level into the 41 hospital - they apply, they don't get it - it definitely turns them off wanting to come in, but those who do get it 42 43 they can see their skills in practice, they get mentorship, 44 which we know is extremely important in the early years of 45 development for a healthcare professional, and if you have 46 a very positive experience early on, that will keep people for a long time. That's the retention strategy. 47

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1 2 But we're finding they're very attracted to hospital because that's where their medication knowledge will be 3 4 used the most, in the most complex patients environment, 5 but if we don't look after them, then they're going to So increasing the number will definitely attract 6 leave. 7 more people to see the joys of hospital, to see - for 8 patients to get those benefits that we've talked about, 9 which is really good, and I think we have interns or 10 students wanting those positions. But we also want to make sure we look after them once they're in. 11 12 13 MR MUSTON: Looking after them once they're in requires 14 sufficient workforce to enable mentorship and support to be 15 provided to the interns, presumably. 16 17 DR PENM: Yes. Looking after them is having those 18 resident training programs afterwards to then facilitate 19 the specialised skills that they need if they want to 20 progress their career. It needs to be rewarding them for 21 those skills and to recognise the value they have - that 22 comes from the healthcare awards, so that also needs to be looked at, and then having the educators and mentorship 23 24 that we've talked about. 25 26 MR MUSTON: Just before we come to the educators and 27 mentorship again, can I ask, in your statement on page 6 28 you refer to the situation in Victoria where intern 29 positions are 60 per cent funded by the state government. Could I just ask you to expand, does that mean that they 30 31 are 40 per cent funded from somewhere else, or they are 32 not - you only get 60 per cent of an income if you're an 33 intern? 34 35 MR YIK: It is certainly not that we get only 60 per cent 36 of the wage. In Victoria they have a fairly centralised recruitment and funding model for hospital pharmacy interns 37 That government does take the 38 in Victorian hospitals. entry pipeline into workforce fairly seriously and so the 39 40 Victorian government provides 60 per cent of the intern 41 pharmacist's salary to the hospital and health service, and so the hospital only has to pay - find 40 per cent of the 42 43 intern's wage from their own budget. 44 45 In New South Wales, the way that it works is without that funding, without dedicated funding from the 46 government, they have to find 100 per cent of the wage, and 47

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that might be the case in other states as well, but I think 1 2 the results from Victoria are really clear. They take 3 entry and workforce pipeline fairly seriously, and they 4 know that hospitals themselves cannot fund it alone. So 5 providing that support to Victorian hospitals means that they can hire even more interns. I think the results speak 6 for themselves. 7 8 9 DR PENM: One example of that is that one of the largest 10 hospitals in New South Wales doesn't take any interns. Even though it's a teaching hospital, it's one of the 11 12 largest, in some sense probably needs it the most, they don't, because it comes 100 per cent out of their budget 13 14 and they say, "Well, we're struggling to deliver the service as it is, we're just going to hire four 15 16 pharmacists." The consequence is you're filling in holes and you're going to cause more problems for yourself in the 17 18 future. 19 20 In Victoria your major teaching hospitals take MR YIK: 21 anywhere between 7 to 10 interns each year. I think in 22 New South Wales it would range from zero to four. 23 24 DR PENM: You don't see four very often Zero to two. 25 these days. 26 27 THE COMMISSIONER: What is the hospital you are referring 28 to in New South Wales? 29 DR PENM: That would be Westmead Hospital. 30 31 32 MR MUSTON: So do you see value in the centralised 33 recruitment process which is operated through Victoria? 34 Putting to one side the way the funding works, of the salaries, what do you see is the value of that centralised 35 36 recruitment process, say starting from the perspective of the student? 37 38 DR PENM: Centralised recruitment would mean that the job 39 40 applications are centralised, the whole process of 41 interviews and putting in your preferences. That comes 42 with two main benefits. One is it means you can prioritise 43 all your efforts on making one application good, as opposed 44 to putting in 40 applications that often have mistakes, 45 which is very, very exhausting for students. 46 47 I see, once they go into a job interview, there will

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1 be over 150 applicants for one position. Their chance of 2 being rejected is high. But when they get an interview and 3 they get rejected not just once, they get rejected twice, 4 three times, four times, they don't want to keep applying. 5 It's emotionally, mentally exhausting, because it's not They've got to apply for each place, and you 6 centralised. 7 can only take so much rejection while doing full-time 8 study, while also working, making sure exams are okay and 9 trying to get a job next year, so I find our students would 10 value a lot from that.

12 The other part is they have to really prioritise that, 13 so they can't really say, "I just want this for the 14 leverage"; it's, "Which hospitals are worth my time?" For 15 a lot of people based in the general metro region they will 16 generally go to a large hospital but that means our smaller 17 regional hospitals suffer for that.

19 We have people who are probably happy to work there 20 but they just don't have the capacity to apply for it, they 21 have to prioritise their time. So we do see in some places 22 people who will apply to a regional/rural hospital, or they might want to, but because they are waiting out for the 23 larger hospital to do their advertisement, they're just not 24 25 going to apply until that does. So there are just multiple 26 add-on effects around distribution and equity of positions 27 in New South Wales by not having it centralised.

MR MUSTON: Something you said a moment ago about waiting for a larger hospital to advertise, is it also the case at the moment in New South Wales that pharmacy positions are advertised as and when they are required, including intern positions; there's not a season where everyone who wants a pharmacist this year puts out an ad and says, "We want a pharmacist"?

I think they all try to, but the priorities mean 37 DR PENM: that everyone will start to advertise in the second half of 38 39 the year, but that can range -it can be a difference of one 40 to four months, and every HR group seems to have 41 a different timeline, you know, how they advertise it. So we do know we need them for next year, but it's not like 42 43 this month they all happen; it can happen in a four- to 44 six-month period.

46 MR MUSTON: Do I gather from what you've told us that at 47 least your view is from the perspective of students, if not

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1 the system, a centralised recruitment process for 2 pharmacists entering into at least into their intern year 3 would be a sensible idea? 4 DR PENM: 5 I think students would love it, would be very 6 positive towards it. 7 8 MR MUSTON: No doubt pharmacists within facilities who are 9 having to review multiple applications and interview 10 candidates who they are not going to give the job to would probably also appreciate it. Mr Yik, as someone who 11 practices in a hospital perhaps not doing that work, do you 12 have a comment on that? 13 14 I think what Dr Penm has described is very 15 MR YIK: 16 It's not just good, as you've described, for the accurate. 17 students but also for the hospital, where they're not sifting through, you know, more applications than they need 18 So through that central applicant process you can give 19 to. 20 your top, you know, three preferences and then you get matched according to that, so then everyone has less work 21 22 to do but it's much more targeted and appropriate and more efficient for everyone. 23 24 25 MR MUSTON: Increasing the number of intern positions by 100 FTE would have two benefits, presumably: the first is 26 it would increase the pharmacy workforce at the junior end 27 28 who is able to do some of that junior work, like 29 reconciliation, easy dispensing and the like --30 31 MR YIK: Mmm. 32 33 DR PENM: Mmm. 34 MR MUSTON: 35 -- which would relieve the pressure on 36 existing pharmacy workforce - yes? 37 Yes, absolutely. So obviously intern pharmacists 38 MR YIK: still need to be supervised by pharmacists during their 39 40 intern year, but they are able to undertake a lot of those 41 activities under the supervision of pharmacists that can contribute to making sure that patients get medication 42 43 reconciliation, they get some medication chart review, they 44 get counselling by a pharmacy professional as well. 45 46 MR MUSTON: Whilst there is a burden of the supervision, 47 by increasing the number of interns you would, in effect,

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be increasing the workforce or the realistic workforce that is to say, more work could be done by increasing the
number of interns? It's not just that they would be
watching, adding more strain on the resources of existing
pharmacy workforce?

MR YIK: Yes. It certainly does increase the output, the
 clinical output that a pharmacy department can provide. It
 certainly makes the care more comprehensive and safer and
 higher quality as well.

MR MUSTON: From a pipeline point of view, it would seem
logical that increasing the number of intern positions
would improve the strength of the pipeline of pharmacists
coming into hospitals, but is that assumption sound?

17 MR YIK: Look, it is sound to an extent, because you are 18 increasing the knowledge base of pharmacy professionals in New South Wales that are appropriate and trained in the 19 20 hospital setting. As we've presented in our evidence, 21 I think up to - some hospitals are reporting up to 90 per cent of their applicants for hospital pharmacy jobs 22 are just inappropriate or not suitable or not suitably 23 24 qualified for the job, because all of their experience has been in the community pharmacy setting. 25

That's transferrable to the hospital setting to an extent. There's still significant retraining and training requirements for the hospital setting, and where you are already a short-staffed workplace, it's a lot to take on, and so we just end up in this cycle where we end up not recruiting anyone.

So increasing the number of intern placements can probably - well, will likely increase the available workforce pool that is appropriate to work in the hospital pharmacy setting without significant retraining required, but I think we also want to keep them in that hospital setting at the end of their intern year.

We don't want to spend - unfortunately, this is the case for a lot of states and a lot of hospitals where we spend a whole year spending money or spending our workforce on training the intern, our doctors and nurses help train that intern as well, and then at the end of the year, "Sorry, there's no funding for your position, even though we would really like to keep you on this ward, so we're

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going to have to let you go back out into the community."
The hospitals rightly train students from all healthcare
disciplines and have a duty to do so, but why are we not
keeping them in the system at the end?

In terms of that training and the way in which 6 MR MUSTON: it's delivered, you've talked about educators in your 7 8 statement and the importance of having a workforce of 9 educators who actually assist in guiding that training both 10 at an intern level but also through advanced skills 11 training. Do you see value in that process being 12 centralised within the ministry - that is to say, the training workforce to potentially be a part of, say, 13 14 a central pillar of the ministry that's also involved in recruiting the interns? 15

17 MR YIK: Yes, look, I think we're certainly very open to I think at this point we would take any attention or 18 that. 19 funding from the ministry that looks at the education and 20 training of pharmacy professionals beyond internship. 21 I think as we've described in our evidence, in Australia 22 there are resident pharmacist and registrar pharmacist training programs that are convened by AdPha. 23 So far, 24 we've got over 800 pharmacists who have either undertaken 25 or have completed a training program, yet only 50 of them -26 sorry, less than 50 of them are from New South Wales, and 27 that is because there is no capacity and no funding to fund 28 those positions for residents or registrar pharmacists. Even for hospitals that do want to provide these training 29 programs and think, "Well, I've got an oncology ward and 30 I need an oncology pharmacist, I want to train a pharmacist 31 32 in the area", again, the lack of educators can often be 33 a barrier as well.

35 So even when we want to try and hire education 36 pharmacists within our hospitals, that can be really 37 difficult to get approval and clearance from the LHD.

In what you've described, where it's a more 39 40 centralised process and you could have pharmacy educators 41 that are employed by the ministry and deployed to various LHDs where there is need, I think - I can't speak for all 42 43 hospitals, but it would certainly be better than what we 44 have now, because at the moment, it's quite sparse. The 45 education pharmacist network in New South Wales is - yes, 46 it is quite sparse, and so any more funding via various means would be very, very welcome. 47

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1 2 MR MUSTON: That education workforce - you've mentioned 3 the value, obviously, of face-to-face pharmacy when dealing 4 with patients as potentially being better than remotely delivered pharmacy, but remotely is better than nothing. 5 What about education? Is there scope for remotely 6 7 delivered education through pharmacist educators who are 8 not necessarily on the ground, particularly in smaller 9 facilities in rural and regional areas? 10 I think there absolutely is a capacity for 11 MR YIK: Yes. 12 that and it's something that we would be very, very happy As we've talked about, these resident 13 to explore. pharmacists and registrar pharmacist training programs, we 14 15 want to deliver them in rural and regional healthcare 16 settings but, of course, you may not have the education 17 pharmacists there on site because they don't happen to live there, but that should not be the 18 19 rate-limiting step as to why a young pharmacy professional 20 can't undertake those training programs. 21 So we are very open to having mentors or education 22 23 pharmacists delivering the services remotely or via, you know - we all have Zoom and Teams nowadays, and every time 24 25 that we accredit those sites to undertake and deliver those 26 training programs, as long as you can demonstrate that you can provide that service, then that should be fine. 27 So if 28 that is to be delivered electronically or via telehealth -29 via Zoom or Teams - we would facilitate that and accredit that program. 30 31 32 The ability to know where it's needed and MR MUSTON: 33 where that outreach or remote teaching might best be delivered requires some level of centralised control or 34 35 coordination over the process, though, presumably? 36 37 MR YIK: It would and it would require the attention and knowledge of what pharmacy educators provide and the 38 importance to ensuring the quality of clinical placements 39 40 for pharmacy students and for interns and for developing 41 your current pharmacist workforce as well. 42 43 MR MUSTON: In terms of those pharmacists who have 44 obtained those advanced skills training, you tell us in the 45 statement - I assume I've understood it correctly - that to 46 the extent that there are benefits associated with 47 pharmacists being involved in the delivery of care in terms

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- of reducing errors, enhancing outcomes, those benefits are
  enhanced even further where a pharmacist with some advanced
  skills training is operating within an area of that
  particular where they have that skill?
- 6 MR YIK: Yes. Absolutely, and we have developed these 7 programs so that patients are receiving services from the 8 most appropriately trained pharmacists.
- 10 Going back to, you know, two decades ago, if you were walking into an infectious diseases ward or an oncology 11 12 ward, the pharmacist that was being put into that ward may have just been a general pharmacist who may not have 13 14 received training, but because there were just no formalised training programs at all, there was an 15 16 expectation, or it was a standard, really, that you would 17 just learn on the job.
- 19 So you did that model for a number of years, for 20 decades, because there was no other model to ensure that 21 pharmacists were ready, educated and prepared, before they 22 stepped into that ward. And this is what this program aims 23 to provide, because it's just much safer and more 24 appropriate for the patient.
- MR MUSTON: Given the relatively small number of people in New South Wales who are passing through this program, do I infer from what you said a moment ago that, at least in New South Wales, as distinct, perhaps, from other states, we're still doing things the same way as we were doing them decades ago?
- MR YIK: If at all, and I guess we go back to our very early evidence, that there are still many wards that don't have pharmacists on them at all. But I guess as you've suggested, even when you do have a pharmacist on that ward in New South Wales, they may not be the most appropriately trained or - sorry, they may not have sufficient training compared to practitioners and their peers in other states.
- MR MUSTON: Just in relation to what you tell us about the
  resident pharmacist positions and resident training
  programs, what is in the context of a pharmacist's
  educational and professional journey, a resident position?
  Is it a particular assignation of position or is it more
  you are a full-time pharmacist working in a facility who
  then wants to get some more training?

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1 2 MR YIK: A resident pharmacist position is aimed at 3 pharmacists who are entering at the start of their career, 4 it is to consolidate and expand the skills that they have 5 obtained in the intern year. For a resident pharmacist in a hospital, they will often do four six-month rotations, so 6 7 it's a two-year program, and those rotations will take them 8 through the busiest parts of the hospital, so that they go 9 on a really steep curve in developing and consolidating 10 their skills. 11

I think it's six months in the dispensary, six months in the surgical ward, and six months in a general medicine ward because both of those wards have really high patient flows so you get exposed to a lot of different patients and develop your skills really, really quickly, and comprehensively.

19 Then your final rotation can be an area of your choice 20 that will expose you to a specialist ward. So it could be 21 your final rotation might be through the oncology ward, it 22 might be through the psychiatry ward, it might be through 23 the stroke ward, to get you exposed to an area that you 24 might want to specialise in that also requires a pharmacist 25 to be working in that ward as well.

I was going to say, what it provides different 27 DR PENM: 28 to a regular fully registered pharmacist is just structured 29 training and mentorship. Because we have not had funding. or lack of funding, a lot of our departments just don't 30 31 feel they can offer that training, and so they say, "Figure 32 it out yourself. You're on your own." That's not helpful 33 for from an investment point of view from our workforce 34 retention.

So having these roles doesn't change the tasks they do, but it shows the support we have for them, that their career is important, that we value their service, and I feel that pharmacists in New South Wales don't always get that message and they don't have these programs, and other states do.

43 MR MUSTON: You tell us that there's potential benefit in
44 providing funding to enable hospital pharmacy student
45 placements within NSW Health facilities. What is the
46 benefit to be gained there?

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We see that a lot of students will - I'll step 1 DR PENM: 2 Your early years and experiences really do shape back. 3 where your career goes and where you can see yourself, and 4 because we don't have the capacity to even teach our own 5 pharmacists in the hospital, we have even less capacity, 6 sometimes, to take students. So I think within the report - and I'll have to figure out the page - but within 7 8 New South Wales --

10 MR MUSTON: Page 14.

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DR PENM: Page 14, thank you. We only offer about a month
of exposure to the hospital environment for our students,
versus, say, Victoria, has two to four months.

More exposure to hospital will help our students see themselves do that role, see that as a career path, help develop their mentorship, their identity. I think it will not only provide value to the students because they will now be more aware of what's happening in the hospital,

I think even those who go to community need to know what happens in the hospital, because that helps that transition of care thing we talked about earlier. Discharge becomes a problem when the community doesn't know what's happening, so they need to know what's happening for the hospital to get those benefits.

29 But I would also argue, as an educator, that having students in the hospital helps keep everyone performing 30 better. When you're constantly teaching and you're 31 32 constantly learning, that is a good environment for health 33 That is a good environment for our patients. care. Βv 34 taking students or limiting exposure to students, we fall into a scenario or culture where teaching is what you do 35 36 when you have extra capacity, not - learning is not what you do every day, and I think teaching and learning should 37 be things that happen every day, to have a system that is 38 constantly trying to be better, constantly trying to keep 39 40 our patients safe, and that's a good thing.

42 MR MUSTON: To the extent that it's suggested in your 43 statement that more funding is required to enable that to 44 occur, is that, in essence, a reference to the need to free 45 up sufficient time within a workforce to enable that 46 teaching to occur? It is not suggested that the placement 47 students would be paid for their placements or anything

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1 2	like that, is it?
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	MR YIK: Yes, look, I think there are, I guess, two prongs into that approach. One is - so funding for the clinical pharmacist educator is important, because if you have students going to your hospital, a lot of hospitals are being asked to do it out of the kindness of their own heart and because they have some moral responsibility to train the next generation of healthcare workers, and some hospitals do take that on, where they can, but as Dr Penm has said, they can't even train their own pharmacists, so a lot of hospitals don't.
14 15 16 17 18 19 20	So in other states, in other universities, they actually do pay for the position of the clinical pharmacist educator for the three or four weeks that they have their uni students in that hospital. I don't think that's occurring at all in New South Wales, and that's something that should be explored as well.
20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	I think for the pharmacist - sorry, for the pharmacy student as well, historically, these placements were not paid, and - because placements weren't paid for, for a while. But what we are hearing from students nowadays is, "Yes, I want to do placements. It enhances my learning and it consolidates what I learn at university", but because of the cost of living crisis, because of placement poverty, students can't afford to do clinical placements full time if that means they can't work at their part-time job to pay for rent and pay for bills.
32 33 34 35	So I think again, that probably does need to be looked at again. We should be funding - we should be paying pharmacy students if they are undertaking a placement throughout their degree.
36 37 38 39 40	MR MUSTON: A pharmacy student undertaking a placement, are they able to actually make a meaningful contribution to the work of the pharmacy department or is it purely observation?
41 42 43 44 45 46 47	DR PENM: We did do that work earlier, at Sydney University, where we had students conduct best possible medication histories. They can provide value. I do hear your point that it's also - it takes time to teach and they might be learning, so why would you pay someone when they're learning? There are places that do use their

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1 skills and provide value to the hospital. I think there 2 are areas that they can provide value but you need to have 3 the infrastructure, educators and supervisors to do that, 4 and when they don't, it's very hard to utilise them to 5 their full potential. I think in an environment like New South Wales, where we don't have a lot of staffing, 6 7 it's very hard for them to see how to use pharmacy students 8 at times, but we do have ways that you can if you have the 9 right staffing. 10 MR MUSTON: 11 The last question I want to ask you is about 12 the pharmacists award and the proposition that it needs to 13 be reformed. What is it about the pharmacists award that you think could be adjusted to solve some of these problems 14 that you have identified? 15 16 17 MR YIK: Look, I think the award is really basic and doesn't meet the needs of pharmacists in New South Wales 18 19 It doesn't recognise the ability or the need for todav. 20 pharmacists to specialise and advance their skills in 21 different clinical areas. There's a fairly low ceiling 22 that you can hit fairly quickly. It doesn't offer enough career progression at all. The pay scales aren't 23 24 competitive in a state like New South Wales where you do have various clinical bodies such as the Clinical 25 26 Excellence Commission, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, the department, the Ministry of 27 28 Health, and pharma companies in Ryde as well - there's 29 a lot of areas in which pharmacists can move into in the state of New South Wales, which is really good. 30 31 32 That's really great for New South Wales pharmacy 33 students and pharmacists. However, you need to make sure

33 students and pharmacists. However, you need to make sure 34 that your hospitals that are providing care to patients are 35 also appropriately staffed and that you are attracting and 36 retaining the best possible pharmacists that you can have, 37 and the award does not support that at this point in time. 38

MR MUSTON: What is it about the award that means it lacks
a career progression? What does the current career
progression look like, at least through the lens of the
award?

44 MR YIK: You have grade 1, 2 and 3 and you get the senior 45 pharmacist. So at that senior pharmacist level, at that 46 grade 3 level, in some hospitals you'll find grade 3 47 pharmacists who have been there for maybe five years, but

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all of the extra pharmacists have been there for 40 years
or 30 years, who are absolute experts in oncology or
absolute experts in infectious diseases. The current award
does not really make much of a distinction between those
two groups of pharmacists. They are both excellent
pharmacists, but perhaps that pharmacist who has been there
for 30 years is just that bit better.

9 I think having that robustness and recognition of 10 those advanced skills and consolidated skills needs to be reflected in the award, recognition through the Australian 11 and New Zealand College of Advanced Pharmacy as well, where 12 vou are recognised as a resident, registrar or consultant 13 14 in the 46 disciplines recognised by ANZCAP, allowances for if you have achieved higher education as well, so if you 15 16 have done a masters, a grad dip or a PhD, that should be 17 recognised through the award as well.

19 I think when you are also looking at the directorships 20 and leadership and management positions as well, they 21 should be strongly reviewed as well, because you have 22 pharmacists reaching that grade 7, grade 6 level of the award, on a salary that is, I think, 150 to 170, depending 23 24 on what hospital you are at, but your responsibility is so large - I don't know how else to describe it - you are 25 26 managing a drug budget, an annual drug budget of over 27 \$200 million.

29 I think in any other type of healthcare area or supply chain department, where you're managing a budget that 30 large, you're probably being paid a bit more than that, and 31 32 so again - and when you're reaching that grade 5, 6, 7 level of the award, you're probably also a really good 33 34 candidate to work in all these other opportunities in areas that New South Wales can offer as well. So again, does the 35 36 award incentivise. attract and retain pharmacists to work in hospitals where they're delivering patient care? 37 I think the answer is no. And I think that's probably what 38 really needs to be reformed. 39

41 DR PENM: One thing I might just highlight, if you look at the award, grade 4 and above is really limited to directors 42 43 and deputy directors. It is limited to management. What 44 we've talked about today is a lot of the value we provide 45 is a clinical service, so the award doesn't really value 46 clinical expertise, clinical specialisation, in its current So we do have those people who are, as Mr Yik has 47 form.

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said, grade 3. They are very high clinicians, they want to
keep pursuing that, they want to keep doing well there, but
the award doesn't recognise if they do, and I think that
can be very frustrating for our members.

6 MR YIK: I think the take-away from that is that you have pharmacists who love patient care. They are really, really 7 8 dedicated to providing the best possible patient care to 9 the patients in hospitals, but for them to further their 10 career, they have to step away from patient care. I think this is what the award is telling them or the signals that 11 12 the award and the landscape is sort of indicating - to advance their career, they have to go into positions that 13 14 take them away from direct patient care.

16 MR MUSTON: Whilst not picked up in the award, in the sense that, as I understand your evidence, it doesn't 17 18 result in you being paid more money or going up a grade, is the advanced training or recognition of advanced training 19 20 qualifications used in any other way in a practical sense 21 within the system at the moment? That is to say, does it 22 change in any material way the way in which you might, in 23 any particular facility, go about your work?

25 MR YIK: Formally through the recognition of awards, no, 26 but it is something that we want to influence and change. and these obviously - the structure of these awards were, 27 28 you know, done many decades ago, and so they haven't kept up to pace with how the healthcare landscape has changed, 29 where we do have training colleges, you do have resident 30 31 and registrar training programs for allied health and for 32 So I think the short answer is no, but that's pharmacists. 33 not because there isn't a need for it. There absolutely is 34 a need for it and - yes. So that needs to be the 35 discussion, whenever awards are being negotiated.

37 DR PENM: I might just add to that that it kind of shows where that recognition comes from, is that because 38 39 pharmacists are not being recognised in the award, they 40 want these other pathways to show off the skills they have. 41 They would love for it to be recognised in the award, that would be amazing. But they have a skill, patients benefit, 42 people need to know about it, and that's really where 43 44 that's - why those programs exist and why those fellowships 45 exist, to help make that obvious that, yes, it is 46 a different level. It's just not recognised here. 47

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1 MR YIK: I guess, yes, a lot of these programs that we've discussed today are industry led, led by our association, 2 because there's an absolute need for it. Where the award 3 4 is failing to recognise that, we've stepped in to provide 5 that recognition program so that pharmacists can rightly feel proud and happy of what they're achieving and what 6 they're providing to their patients and having - "Yes, 7 8 I can say that, I am a consultant pharmacist in geriatric 9 medicine because my college recognises me, even if my award doesn't." 10 11 MR MUSTON: 12 Thank you. I have no further questions for 13 these witnesses, Commissioner. 14 THE COMMISSIONER: Mr Chiu? 15 16 17 MR CHIU: Commissioner, I have no questions for these 18 witnesses but there are a couple of matters that I wanted 19 to raise with you. I can do that after the break, if you 20 prefer. 21 22 THE COMMISSIONER: A couple of matters you want to raise with me in chambers? 23 24 25 MR CHIU: No, in open court, as it were. 26 27 THE COMMISSIONER: You can do that now, if you like. 28 29 MR CHIU: The first is something that fell from you earlier as to where the New South Wales Government or 30 31 NSW Health's response is to the ramping inquiry --32 33 THE COMMISSIONER: I was reading from --34 Just so you are aware, there was some 35 MR CHIU: Yes. evidence about that in an earlier statement of Ms Dominish 36 in the earlier workforce block, if you wanted to have 37 a look at that. 38 39 40 THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you. 41 The second matter is that the issue of 42 MR CHIU: 43 centralisation of intern recruitment for pharmacists, that 44 wasn't previously raised, as I recall, with Ms Dominish. 45 I would like to take some instructions from her and 46 potentially put on a supplementary statement, if you would 47 permit me.

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1 2 THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, of course, yes. 3 4 MR CHIU: Thank you, Commissioner. 5 THE COMMISSIONER: 6 Okay. We might adjourn until 2.15, given it is 1.20, so we will adjourn until 2.15. 7 8 9 MR MUSTON: We will excuse these two. 10 I'm about to not only excuse them but THE COMMISSIONER: 11 thank them very much for their attendance. 12 13 14 We're very grateful for the time you have spent on 15 this. 16 17 MR YIK: Thank you. 18 19 DR PENM: Thank you. 20 21 <THE WITNESS WITHDREW 22 LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT 23 24 THE COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon. 25 26 27 MR MUSTON: Commissioner, this afternoon's panel, at least 28 in person, from your left to your right is Michael Bonning, 29 a general practitioner and former president of the AMA; Luke Sloane, the deputy secretary, rural and regional 30 31 health, from the ministry; and Rebekah Hoffman, who is the 32 chair of the New South Wales and ACT faculty of the Royal 33 Australian College of General Practitioners. 34 35 On your screen is Georgina van de Water, the CEO of 36 the Australian College of General Practitioners - you can work out which one she is, because the background tells 37 you - and Dr Rachel Christmas, who we have heard some 38 evidence from before, the president of the Rural Doctors' 39 40 Association NSW. 41 42 THE COMMISSIONER: All right. 43 44 I think we probably need to work out which MR MUSTON: 45 ones will take an affirmation and which ones will take an 46 oath and we can probably do them quickly in two lots. 47

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2 3	<michael affirmed:<="" bonning,="" td=""></michael>
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6 7	<rachel affirmed<="" christmas,="" td=""></rachel>
8 9	<rebekah affirmed:<="" hoffman,="" td=""></rebekah>
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11	MR MUSTON: Quickly, Dr Bonning, could you state your full
12	name for the record, please.
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14	DR BONNING: Dr Michael Bonning.
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16	MR MUSTON: You are a general practitioner and a former
17	president of the AMA?
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19	DR BONNING: The AMA here in New South Wales, yes.
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21	MR MUSTON: Thank you. And you've prepared a statement to
22	assist the Inquiry with its work, dated 23 July 2024?
23	
24	DR BONNING: Yes.
25	
26	MR MUSTON: Do you have a copy of that statement with you?
27	
28	DR BONNING: I do. Thank you.
29 30	MR MUSTON: Have you had a chance to review it before you
30 31	give your evidence today?
32	give your evidence coudy:
33	DR BONNING: I wrote it, so yes.
34	
35	MR MUSTON: You have reviewed it sufficiently recently to
36	be able to tell us whether you are, as you sit there now,
37	confident that its contents are, to the best of your
38	knowledge, true and correct?
39	
40	DR BONNING: Yes.
41	
42	MR MUSTON: That can be found behind tab H7.9. I probably
43	should have indicated, Commissioner, Mr Chapman appears for
44	the AMA.
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46	THE COMMISSIONER: Leave is granted, to the extent
47	necessary, thank you.

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1 I think it has been granted previously. 2 MR MUSTON: 3 Mr Sloane, could you state your full name for the 4 5 record, please. 6 MR SLOANE: 7 Luke Anthony Sloane. 8 9 MR MUSTON: You are the deputy secretary of rural and regional health within the NSW Ministry of Health? 10 11 MR SLOANE: That's correct. 12 13 MR MUSTON: You've prepared two statements to assist the 14 Inquiry with its work, the first dated 9 April 2024? 15 16 17 MR SLOANE: Yes. 18 MR MUSTON: And another one, more recent statement, dated 19 20 3 October 2024? 21 22 MR SLOANE: Yes. 23 MR MUSTON: You have copies of both of them with you? 24 25 MR SLOANE: I do. 26 27 MR MUSTON: You, too, have had an opportunity to review 28 29 them before giving your evidence today? 30 MR SLOANE: Yes, I have. 31 32 33 MR MUSTON: Are you satisfied that their contents are true and correct? 34 35 MR SLOANE: Yes, I am. 36 37 MR MUSTON: They are behind tabs D6 and L3, Commissioner. 38 39 THE COMMISSIONER: 40 Yes. 41 MR MUSTON: Dr Hoffman, could you state your full name for 42 the record, please. 43 44 45 DR HOFFMAN: Dr Rebekah Hoffman. 46 MR MUSTON: You're the chair of the New South Wales and 47

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1 ACT faculty of the Royal Australian College of General **Practitioners?** 2 3 4 DR HOFFMAN: Correct? 5 MR MUSTON: How long have you held that role? 6 7 8 DR HOFFMAN: Twelve months this week. 9 10 MR MUSTON: When you're not dealing with the work that you do within that role, you're a general practitioner 11 practising in the southern suburbs of Sydney? 12 13 DR HOFFMAN: Correct. 14 15 MR MUSTON: Ms van de Water, could you state your full 16 17 name for the record, please. 18 MS VAN DE WATER: Georgina Scott van de Water. 19 20 21 MR MUSTON: You are the CEO of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners? 22 23 MS VAN DE WATER: That's correct. 24 25 MR MUSTON: 26 How long have you been in that role? 27 MS VAN DE WATER: I've been in this role for six months, 28 29 I've been with the RACGP for two and a half years. 30 MR MUSTON: Thank you. 31 32 33 Finally, Dr Christmas, could you state your full name for the record again, please. 34 35 Dr Rachel Christmas. DR CHRISTMAS: 36 37 You are the president of the Rural Doctors 38 MR MUSTON: Association of New South Wales? 39 40 41 DR CHRISTMAS: I am. 42 MR MUSTON: When you are not dealing with the work 43 associated with that office, you are a GP VMO practising 44 45 in, if my memory serves me correctly, Temora. 46 DR CHRISTMAS: 47 Correct, yes.

.16/10/2024 (056) 5804 GENERAL PRACTICE PANEL Transcript produced by Epiq 2 MR MUSTON: With advanced skills training in obstetrics?

4 DR CHRISTMAS: That's right.

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MR MUSTON: Age hasn't taken away all of my faculties quite yet.

9 In terms of the process and the way in which we go 10 about the evidence this afternoon, I'm going to ask 11 a series of questions working through a range of issues 12 that are of interest to the Inquiry.

14 Equally, I would invite any of you who have issues which you think are adjacent to areas on which questions 15 16 might be asked, to tell us and chime in. Don't feel that 17 you are confined in any strict sense to the questions I'm asking, but equally, don't feel that you are prevented from 18 19 asking one another questions, if you think that would be 20 a useful way of trying to get to the bottom of some of 21 these issues.

What we are hoping to do, having identified through 23 24 our regional hearings and some early workforce hearings, what we see as some of the key challenges particularly 25 26 within the workforce area in this, for the purposes of this 27 particular session, within the area of primary care, we're 28 looking to try and tease out some potential solutions based 29 on the wealth of experience that you all have coming from It may well be that the questions 30 different perspectives. 31 that you're able to ask one another through that process 32 are of greater utility than any questions I will be able to 33 ask you. So please don't feel constrained in any way from 34 doing so if you think that would be helpful.

But can I start just by making sure our baseline, in terms of the challenges, accords with what each of you see as being the key challenges within this area. The first is that within the medical workforce, there is a generational shift away from general practice at the moment. Would you all generally agree that that's a key challenge in the area of primary health?

44 DR BONNING: Yes.

46 MR SLOANE: Yes.

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1 DR CHRISTMAS: Yes.

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MR MUSTON: That has, as one of the immediate consequences, a challenge which is it makes accessing good primary care very difficult for many people within New South Wales.

8 DR BONNING: I think that the challenge in splitting that 9 out is that Australia's workforce planning around primary 10 care, general practice, as opposed to where we get our general practitioners from, includes a significant number, 11 12 and I think slightly more than half of the practising GPs in Australia originally did their medical training in other 13 14 So that becomes how we have managed the countries. workforce over an extended period of time. 15 That's both 16 through Australia's recruitment kind of pathways and visa 17 schemes as well as, I think, international doctors seeing 18 our system and wanting to move here, Australia is a great 19 place to work. So, you know, there is a number of pushes 20 and - sorry, pulls and pushes that are sending people to be 21 part of our primary care system.

23 MR MUSTON: So the drift away from primary care as 24 a career path, at least on the part of domestically trained 25 doctors, is a contributing factor to challenges that are 26 faced by the community in accessing good primary care?

28 DR BONNING: Yes.

MR MUSTON: But to an extent, that challenge is being addressed, at least in some part, by the introduction of a substantial body of internationally trained general practitioners into the workforce?

35 DR BONNING: Yes.

37 MR SLOANE: I would probably just make one other comment. When we're defining primary care, we talk about 38 specifically the general practice portion of it, because 39 40 there is the rest of the multidisciplinary team that make 41 up good primary care, but I'd say the influences that you 42 have spoken about also have impacted nursing, allied 43 health, practice management, and all the other aspects of 44 work with general practice in the primary care setting. 45

46 On top of that generational move away from general 47 practice, I think there's the other compelling issue of

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1 quite a substantial change in workforce expectations, not 2 only in primary care but in a lot of areas around what 3 would previously have been quite a significant workload 4 that was 24/7, to post COVID era, of a new balance of 5 work/life, whereas one full-time equivalent might have done the work, you know - and again, backing this up with 6 7 evidence across the shortages and FTE or otherwise - that 8 might be two, 2.5FTE doing the same amount of work now, 9 because people don't want to do the overtime and they want that life/work balance, and it's across all aspects of 10 workforce, I think. 11 12 13 MR MUSTON: For those of you who are working in the 14 general practice and primary health setting, is that generally - does that accord with your experience? 15 16 17 DR HOFFMAN: Absolutely. So there's definitely a trend in the upcoming generation, both of males and females are more 18 19 inclined to work part time rather than full time, on 20 average, with many GPs only wanting to do three to four 21 days a week. 22 And I also would add that in rural areas 23 DR CHRISTMAS: 24 where GPs work more than full time. that's a disincentive to people wanting to go rural because they see a workload 25 26 that is unsustainable. 27 28 DR BONNING: I think when you think about - obviously 29 Dr Christmas has just made that comment, but on top of that, when you think about your workforce strategies for 30 31 communities where there is a need for an extended version 32 of general practice - I have to be really clear, I work in 33 the city and therefore I see patients in very kind of 34 office hours, but, you know, you need to have a workforce approach that thinks about a community needing four or five 35 36 or six doctors, maybe, to replace only two who are leaving, because the idea that you're willing to do, you know, one 37 in two on call is less and less likely. Also, you know, 38 what we used to consider reasonable, now we would consider 39 40 quite unsafe as well. So there's a shifting understanding 41 of what is both good for the community, but also good for 42 the practitioners. We can talk at other times about the 43 fact that there are many issues with people working too 44 long and too hard, so a normalisation of how the workforce 45 should be used is important, too. 46 Dr Christmas, can I just test that quickly 47 MR MUSTON:

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1 with you. In terms of a practitioner in a rural or 2 regional setting, we've heard a lot of evidence in the 3 course of our travels about the changing work patterns of 4 new graduates and that generation of doctors that are 5 coming through, but is it your experience that the need to replace, say, one FTE with two or three FTEs is not just 6 7 that the two or three who are coming along are not willing 8 to work to the one FTE that was once there, but, rather, 9 the individual they are replacing might, in fact, have been 10 doing two or three FTE of work themselves. 11 12 DR CHRISTMAS: Absolutely, and I think we see that in our 13 registrars coming along, who work very hard and they're very good at what they do, but they are not prepared to 14 work the hours that existing GPs like me are working. 15 And 16 that's not because I want to work those hours; that's 17 because the work just has to be done. 18 19 It may not be because I see excessive amounts of 20 patients during the day, but the load on the administrative 21 and my hospital load as well and my on-call requirement 22 means that there are just so many hours in the day. 23 24 If I were to balance my day, including hospital work and general practice work, into a reasonable, say, 10-hour 25 26 working day, I would see half the number of people that 27 I see in general practice, because I just - there is no 28 time to do the necessaries, the admin, the follow-up, the 29 extra reading, the extra things that you need to do to take 30 care of your patients within work hours. 31 32 MS VAN DE WATER: That's absolutely something we are 33 hearing from our members as well, that the increase in the 34 administrative load on GPs is absolutely impacting on their 35 available patient hours. 36 37 MR MUSTON: So whilst it sounds as though the causes are multifactorial, a challenge that is presented is accessing 38 good primary care not just through GPs but through all of 39 40 the other medical professionals and clinicians who form 41 part of that team that is, a good general practice is 42 increasingly growing very challenging for people within New South Wales? 43 44 45 DR BONNING: Yes. 46 I would be commenting for rural and regional 47 MR SLOANE:

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1 New South Wales, yes, I think that's what we're seeing. 2 3 MR MUSTON: I suppose, just drawing on the experience of 4 all of you in the panel, is that problem particularly 5 acute, do you think, in the rural and regional settings that is, difficulty in accessing good primary care is 6 7 particularly challenging for people who are currently 8 living in rural and regional settings; not all of them, but 9 some? 10 Yes, look, I would say it's varied and very MR SLOANE: 11 12 contextual. Some towns have a very - sorry for the sort of 13 colloquialism - but a very sweet spot around their access 14 to primary care, you know, we've only got to use cases from travelling to go Braidwood and Crookwell and Goulburn this 15 16 week where two years ago they were in a position to have -17 especially Braidwood is a good example, the GP practice was being sold and they didn't see a very near future for that 18 19 to be stood up or continued on, whereas now, two years on, 20 they have very much got a successful GP, it's running very 21 well there, it's co-located with the hospital, they've got 22 visiting rights, it is working very well. They've 23 attracted another GP to come in who is also going to be 24 a VMO at the hospital, and they're expecting a third. they're very able to manage, I think, a population of 3,000 25 26 and it has restored access to general practice in that 27 primary care setting outside of the hospital quite 28 impressively. Similar with Junee. I could go through all 29 the towns where it's working very well. 30 31 However, the alternative is really real as well. 32 Perhaps towns, depending on their liveability as perceived 33 by those people moving there, or deciding not to, you know, 34 some of them are really struggling with even getting a nurse-led model up or attracting health professionals in 35 36 to sustain not only primary care but health care. 37 38 I think you would have heard through evidence to date, 39 from what I have seen and read, that that challenge 40 presents itself in quite a variety of regional towns in 41 New South Wales. 42 43 MR MUSTON: Dr Christmas, I saw you nodding. Did you want 44 to add anything to that? 45 46 DR CHRISTMAS: I think Luke has summarised that No. 47 really well. It does vary depending on the town. But

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1 overall, I would say the statistics are in favour of 2 primary health services being under threat or actually 3 dying in a lot of rural and regional areas. 4 5 DR HOFFMAN: I would add to that by saying that we have spoken before, saying one rural town is one rural town, and 6 some are absolutely having a phenomenal GP workforce and 7 8 Wagga has an incredible GP workforce of mostly thriving. 9 overseas trained doctors. They have a wonderful culture 10 They have attracted and are attracting new doctors there. there, whereas I'm off to Dubbo and Wellington tomorrow and 11 12 they don't. 13 14 MR MUSTON: So variable from town to town or place to 15 place? 16 17 DR BONNING: If you were to think about it, you know, directionally over time, and this is very much my comment, 18 19 there's maybe a hollowing out of rural and regional 20 practice. So there are some centres and they end up 21 becoming hubs for the other local communities, but if you 22 were to go back in time, 20 or 30 years, you would have known those communities to have their own GPs and 23 potentially other allied health professionals who were 24 there, and that has - that model has, you know, not been 25 26 sustainable, both for the workforce reasons and also for 27 financial reasons. 28 29 THE COMMISSIONER: When we talk about access to general practice, though, there's a variety of circumstances -30 there are the towns where the GP market has just failed, 31 32 there is no-one left and there has had to be interventions 33 of one form or another, whatever they ever been. 34 35 Then there are the towns where they are still probably 36 not making huge amounts of money but have what I'll call very full, busy GP practices, but access is problematic to 37 people that are either new to the town or aren't on the 38 books because the books might be closed, or it might take 39 40 between two or six weeks to get an appointment for what 41 I'll call a routine GP visit, which might be in the category of a town or a place or a region that is not 42 43 providing what we would hope for in terms of reasonable 44 access to GPs if you are having to wait that long. So 45 there are all those variations as well. You would agree 46 with that, I imagine? 47

1 DR BONNING: I would agree with that, Commissioner, yes.

- MR SLOANE: I would agree with that, and then I would say that's also reflected in emergency presentation data in those towns where we have a hospital facility with emergency access.
- 8 MR MUSTON: If I could unpack something you said a moment 9 ago, Dr Bonning, about the hollowing out, it's one thing to 10 say a small satellite town adjacent to a centre like, say, Dubbo or Wagga, no longer having a GP where it once was, 11 12 might result in people having to drive from that small 13 satellite town or village into a centre to access their 14 primary care, which may be acceptable, may not be acceptable, depending on the time of the drive, but once 15 16 they get into that central town, there needs to be 17 a sufficient GP workforce to meet the needs of that wider population that they are serving, and it may vary from town 18 19 to town, but often for each GP that retires in a little 20 satellite village, you're not getting an extra one 21 practising in a central town.
- You know, you need 23 DR BONNING: That would be very true. 24 to then coalesce more in a central location. I think a number of us are GPs, GP VMOs on this panel, but I like 25 26 to think of myself as a Swiss army knife when it comes to 27 solving lots of problems in medicine, but I'm not very much 28 without the allied health team and the nursing team that 29 makes up what we do in primary care. There's lots of things we can do on our own, and that is, I think, as 30 31 difficult for my patients, if not far more difficult, 32 because there is at least a very strong floor underneath 33 I can bulk bill people, which I do a lot of the time, me. 34 and thinking about my day at work, you know, you will bulk 35 bill a lot of people because you know that they need it, 36 they need the access.

38 Then, you know, you're talking to some exercise physiologists, and I'm lucky enough to have access to 39 40 certain things in the public system near me, but \$300 41 a week for some people to access some services, you know, 42 if you were trying to get someone on to a program to 43 forestall their diabetes or to make it so that they don't 44 need a knee replacement because we helped them to lose 45 weight, those things are challenging.

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Seeing me for \$82, I bulk bill under the system,

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1 great, but they don't then have the money to take on the I see them for half an hour, wonderful, but for 2 next step. 3 the other 160-odd hours of the week, there's not much 4 that - they need other supports as well in the system 5 because general practice and GPs are only one part of it. 6 7 MR MUSTON: That's a challenge in the metro. 8 9 Can I ask you, Dr Christmas, at least in your part of 10 regional New South Wales, do you find that there is an inability to access that constellation of allied health and 11 other professionals which contribute to the delivery of 12 13 good primary care? 14 Absolutely, because I know in my town, in 15 DR CHRISTMAS: 16 many towns like it, we just don't even have the health 17 professionals available, let alone being able to afford So we have a system that's reliant on people rather 18 them. 19 than processes and systems. If we have a physiotherapist, 20 they take maternity leave, we're without a physiotherapist. 21 22 We don't have an exercise physiologist in our town, we 23 have one who visits, but then people need to be able to 24 afford it, and even with EPC, so enhanced primary care, item numbers, it's still not affordable. 25 We don't have 26 public access to exercise physiologists. 27 28 We have one physic in our public system who is 29 overworked dealing with hospital and outreach centres and being in our town. We have one other physio - or two other 30 31 physios in town, one on maternity leave, one part time. 32 So, yes, we just don't even have the access, let alone 33 making - you know, understanding that the role of allied 34 health is really important in primary care, just accessing people is difficult, and that can fall over if someone 35 36 leaves. 37 Coming back to the definitional issue I think 38 MR MUSTON: that you raised, Mr Sloane, when we're talking about 39 40 primary health and primary care, we should not be just 41 seeing it as an ability to go and have your appointment with a GP within a relatively timely fashion; there are all 42 of those other services that sit around the GP which are 43 44 also, am I right, critically important to the delivery of 45 good primary care? 46 Yes, I think so. Primarily it's access, and 47 MR SLOANE:

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the anecdotes we hear from talking to communities are that, you know, they want to be able to see a face-to-face doctor and there's a lot of faith and admiration of general practice located in all of the regional towns, where it is located. But, yes, it is a multidisciplinary approach, but it relies on that initial consult and referral.

8 But we're looking at models now that are, you know, in 9 necessity and out of necessity from the workforce 10 challenges that we talk about, that might be nurse practitioner led or otherwise. 11 But again, it's as part of a multidisciplinary team, and not every patient's going to 12 13 need to be referred for physio, but it's awfully helpful if 14 we can have a full multidisciplinary team wrapped around every single patient that needs it that comes into 15 16 a service.

Again, we've seen again, probably more so from anecdote more than anything, that there will be physios, allied health or otherwise, leaving, and over the last couple of years, to NDIS or into private practice, leaving the public health service. That is not necessarily, I think, seen terribly our numbers but it is definitely felt by communities.

26 I only yesterday saw the first social worker that has 27 returned to NSW Health from working in the NDIS and it's 28 the first time I've actually heard the opposite story in a 29 long while. We're seeing that in a lot of smaller towns, where they've moved away from - in order to take up, you 30 know, smaller work hours or lower work hours because of 31 32 maternity leave or family obligations or that life/work 33 balance.

So there is a conscious choice, and I think I put it in my statement around how we can then attract and/or retain staff in a work environment, like Michael said, that's very positive and good for them, which is a very healthy move for health professionals into the future, but ultimately they're making choices that will suit them and their lifestyle and especially in regional areas.

43 MR MUSTON: Does anyone want to comment on the way in 44 which I have sought to define primary care?

46 DR CHRISTMAS: I just had a comment on a part of what Luke 47 said about accessing primary care - allied health care.

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1 One of the things with the way things work at the moment is 2 often patients still need to come and see a doctor first, 3 before they can access the primary care through our 4 enhanced primary care models and so on, so that actually doesn't reduce the demand on my services. 5 They still have to see me for a care plan, they still have to see me for 6 follow-up, and so it's not actually taking people out of my 7 8 system. So my books are still full. So even though we 9 know that allied health is really important for certain 10 things like dietetics and physic and exercise physiology, it still requires me to sign off on things to enable people 11 to access that if they're going to use public funding to do 12 13 S0. 14

I would say similarly - sorry, thanks, Rachel, 15 MR SLOANE: 16 that has just triggered - we heard yesterday in Canberra 17 about a piece of work around referrals and referral 18 pathways to specialist care. I think we do hear that 19 a lot, of the need or necessity, and it comes from a little 20 bit of social prescribing as well, to go and see a GP to go 21 and see a specialist yearly, and it's part of continuity of 22 care, but it is one of those things that - the referral process, whether it is necessary or unnecessary to go to 23 24 other specialist care or allied health care or other parts of the multidisciplinary team that I'm sure also takes 25 26 a fair bit of general practice's time up as well.

28 MR MUSTON: I would be interested, having raised that, to 29 explore with the other panel members, Dr Hoffman, the value 30 in having a process whereby someone who is receiving 31 specialist care or sub-specialist care is required to get 32 a referral from a general practitioner. What are the pros 33 and cons from the perspective of someone who is dealing 34 with that?

DR HOFFMAN: 36 I think that the initial referral is Patients, in the nicest way, are 37 absolutely essential. fairly terrible at self-diagnosing and identifying the most 38 streamlined cost-effective way to get a diagnosis and 39 40 treatment. They often want everything that's available, which is incredibly expensive, rather than the one thing 41 they need, and often that one thing they need may not be 42 what they think they need or what they want the answer to 43 44 be. 45

46 GPs are very good at saying, "You don't need 50,000 47 different tests. Let's take your history. Let's do an

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examination. Let's do the one thing that you need" -1 rather than the 50 things that often, online has told them 2 3 to do - "and streamline that process." 4 5 Where I think it can be improved is the ongoing annual reviews. We probably don't need, if they are stable and 6 7 they are seeing their rheumatologist, to continue to refer 8 them back. When we do need to see them is if something has 9 changed. So if, in the meantime, they have had a heart attack or they've had a stroke or they've had a really 10 significant event, then absolutely, we need to update that 11 specialist and send them back. 12 13 14 Does that need to be done by a face-to-face visit and a letter? Probably not. We can definitely communicate, 15 16 and collaborate more effectively than we currently do, and 17 in rural and regional areas, that doesn't need the patient 18 coming in to see a GP to be able to do that. 19 20 Without wanting to hypothetically burden your MR MUSTON: books with unnecessary visits, is there still value in that 21 22 even if it is just an annual visit to get your referral updated because it gives you that opportunity to deliver 23 24 some opportunistic care? 25 26 DR BONNING: I'm trying to think of the last time I saw 27 someone just for a referral, because you use that 28 opportunity, especially for someone who's otherwise 29 relatively well - you know, I have a great patient, he's in his early 40s, he has had problematic hypertension since 30 his 30s, and that is common for some people. 31 He has no 32 other health problems - fit, runs, works, everything else 33 going fine. 34 But the opportunity at his age to think about other 35 interventions for lifestyle, for bending the curve of his 36 likelihood for other comorbidities and diseases across his 37 life course, is actually really useful on at least a once 38 39 annually basis. 40 41 We also know there is a differential in presentations. I would like to see more of the men who are on my books a 42 43 little more frequently, and that's one of the things where 44 we do miss those people. You only have to look at cardiovascular disease as a whole group, it is about 45 46 2.8 million - there was a piece of study work that came out a couple of weeks ago - maybe 2.8 million who are at 47

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higher risk of cardiovascular disease. When you break down
what we actually do for them through the health system,
there is at least a few hundred thousand of them, maybe
pushing up towards 750,000, who are not seen regularly
enough to try and manage these conditions.

7 So, you know, we have this ticking kind of time bomb 8 out in the community of hundreds of thousands of people 9 who, if only we could intervene on some of their risk 10 factors, we would likely at least delay a major cardiovascular event, a heart attack, a stroke, something 11 12 like that, and that has big impacts on both - because we've also got to remember that benefits of good health don't 13 14 necessarily accrue to the health system. The best patient is the one that the public health system will never see. 15

17 Good general practice is invisible because we look 18 after people on a regular basis and they never darken the 19 doorstep of an emergency department or specialist rooms or 20 anything else, and in that moment, the benefits accrue to 21 every other part of society.

23 THE COMMISSIONER: They remain economically active.

25 DR BONNING: But they also remain socially engaged. Thev 26 remain part of a carer pool for grandchildren or parents or whoever. They remain people who, yes, contribute to the 27 28 economy both through their work but also through their 29 engagement with it in other ways. We always see that as a bit of missing part of this. I can keep people really 30 well but no-one else sees it. 31

33 It's very hard to identify where those benefits are, 34 even though what we're seeing from other countries is looking more at, you know, risk adjustment, looking at 35 36 whole cohorts. Do cohorts under certain styles of 37 management perform better? The answer is there are differences. We can stratify for how we should be 38 intervening, where we should be putting funding, because we 39 also know that primary care is incredibly efficient, and it 40 41 is cost-effective as well, because we run it through small businesses but also because we're not treating something 42 43 very simple in a palace of health care that costs hundreds 44 of millions of dollars - that's not a great fit between 45 capital use and the operational needs of the patient, 46 whereas my rooms are. You know, if I need to see you for something, it is relatively simple, I will see you there. 47

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1 2 MR MUSTON: Does anyone want to add to that or have 3 anything they want to say? 4 5 DR CHRISTMAS: Yes, I do. Thank you. I think what 6 Dr Bonning has said is correct. We do so much here that is 7 unseen and that the primary care is really important and 8 the danger in becoming a referral person who just shoots 9 off a referral annually to the cardiologist, (a) it 10 devalues entirely what I do, I become a post office doctor and that's not what I am. 11 12 13 I think the danger is that the population sees me 14 purely as an administrative person and that is absolutely not the case, and that you do lose that opportunity for 15 16 those opportunistic primary care things, the family history 17 that you need to work on, the screening tests, the 18 immunisations, all of those things, lifestyle and 19 lifetime - where you're at in your life and what's 20 important at that time - longitudinally that we do so well 21 in general practice. 22 23 So there are benefits certainly to seeing people 24 regularly and also, when am I going to do the referrals? That would be in my own time, if I don't see them, and 25 26 I don't have time for that. So that time would have to 27 come out from seeing patients. We have to remember that 28 every time you ask a GP to do something, such as a referral without seeing the patient, that's unpaid work that happens 29 30 some other time, and in my case, that would be 10 o'clock 31 at night. 32 33 MS VAN DE WATER: I might add to that. I think the 34 relationship the GP has with their patient, the 35 understanding of their patient's history and the role in 36 preventative care is just invaluable. It's invaluable to 37 the system, it's invaluable to the individual, and certainly has a huge impact on the quality of life of 38 individuals, and I think that's from a non-clinician 39 40 perspective and certainly an observation, listening to the 41 reflections there from Michael and Rachel. 42 43 DR HOFFMAN: There is economic work led by Dr Michael 44 Wright out the University of Technology Sydney - he is a GP 45 as well and heavily involved with the college of GPs -46 which looks at the value of continuity, so the idea of what Georgina van de Water just covered, which was this idea of 47

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1 there is invisible value in not having to repeat the story 2 all over again, not having - you know, the understanding 3 that comes from a long-term relationship of remembering 4 that something happened or that you had an allergy, we know 5 that you had an allergy to something 10, 15 years ago, 6 which you may forget as well. The systems in general practice are actually incredibly good at doing that, but it 7 8 relies upon continuity, so patients remaining within at 9 least the same practice, if not the same practitioner.

11 MR MUSTON: We touched on some of the challenges insofar 12 as they apply in rural and regional settings, and the sort 13 of patchy nature of that, there are patches where there is 14 good access to primary care, there are areas where there is 15 not. What about within metro areas in, say, metro Sydney, 16 Dr Hoffman?

18 DR HOFFMAN: Yes, so in metro Sydney, we actually have less GP FTEs than we do in some of the modified Monash 19 20 There are definitely pockets of three to four areas. 21 Sydney where it's very difficult to find a GP, particularly 22 at short notice. We've released our "Health of the Nation" survey last year which looks at 3,000 GPs, admittedly it is 23 24 across Australia, not just New South Wales and ACT.

26 We are starting to see a turn, a shift in this, and so 27 patients, about 54 per cent, say that they can access their 28 GP within 24 hours if they need to for an urgent reason, 29 and for a non-urgent reason, 90 per cent can access them within two weeks. So we are starting to see that there is 30 31 a shift, there is an improvement. That's a big jump from 32 where we were at 12 months ago. But yes, we do have a long 33 way to go, but we're hopeful that we're starting to see an 34 improvement.

THE COMMISSIONER: What's that improvement? Do you have any sense of what has caused that improvement?

Look, I'm going to step in and speak for 39 DR HOFFMAN: 40 Georgina, but I'm really - RACGP has taken back over 41 training 18 months ago and 2017 was the last time that we filled all of our registrar places. Next year, we've 42 filled them again for the first time, and not only have we 43 44 filled them, we have also been allowed to back-fill last 45 year's places as well. So although, yes, at the beginning 46 we said there's less people wanting to be a GP, we're again seeing that improve. We're again seeing that change. 47

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We've got more people wanting to be a GP next year than we 1 2 have places to train them. So we're actually now going 3 back to the federal government going, "Let's train more. 4 Let's not actually turn any junior doctors away that want 5 to be a GP." Because why would you? We need to train them, we need bums on seats. We have the supervisors ready 6 7 to train them. We have places that are unfilled for 8 registrars. Let's actually use them and put them there. 9 10 So yes, although access is a problem, and it doesn't take overnight to train a GP, it is still three, two years, 11 12 if you have got previous training, to get to be a specialist GP at the end of the day; we're actually 13 14 starting to see some improvement in some numbers. 15 16 MR MUSTON: Just so I can understand the system, you said a moment ago that you have filled the training places and 17 vou have been allowed to back-fill the training from last 18 19 year. Could you just unpack that a little bit? You've got 20 a number of places which are available --21 22 DR HOFFMAN: I will pass to Georgina. 23 24 MR MUSTON: -- which is, I gather from what you are telling me, a lower number than the potential empty chairs 25 26 in practices that could be occupied by trainees; is that 27 right? 28 29 MS VAN DE WATER: Yes, absolutely. Just as an example, for this current term we had over 1,400 available training 30 31 places within training practices. General practice is an 32 apprenticeship model for training, and so our practices 33 that are accredited to supervise registrars in their 34 practices told us they could host a cumulative total of Now, in that, we only had, in full time equivalent, 35 1.423. around about - well, just under 1,000 places, registrars 36 available. That's in New South Wales. 37 38 MR MUSTON: 39 Just pause there. What's the limiting factor? What caps you at the thousand? 40 It's funding of some 41 description I assume. 42 43 MS VAN DE WATER: The number of registrars that have 44 joined the training program over the past number of years. 45 As Rebekah said, we were undersubscribed since 2017. The 46 RACGP is funded by the Department of Health for 1,350 registrars a year across Australia, and those places, for 47

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the first time, in 2025, will be filled and are, in fact, 1 2 oversubscribed by eligible and suitable doctors that are 3 interested in general practice, including our rural 4 generalist program, which is also oversubscribed. 5 6 So it's the cumulative effect of undersubscription 7 over multiple years that has resulted in our inability to 8 meet the supply and demand - well, the supply and demand 9 modelling tells us that there is greater capacity for us to 10 train if there were more doctors in the system to train. 11 12 Now, more doctors in the training system means greater 13 distribution, it means greater access to care for 14 communities, and particularly those communities not only in our rural and remote areas but also our outer metro. 15 16 That's something that we are growing more and more 17 concerned about, is with the urban sprawl, the growth of 18 population, the ability to access care in outer metro communities. 19 20 21 MR MUSTON: Again just so I understand it, the funding 22 that you receive, or that is received from the Commonwealth Government for the training of these registrars, how is it 23 24 channelled from the Commonwealth into the hands of the person who receives it? If you could just talk me through 25 26 that funding stream as it applies to a particular 27 registrar, hypothetical registrar. 28 29 MS VAN DE WATER: The RACGP has a grant agreement with the Department of Health to deliver the Australian General 30 31 Practice Training Program. So we are funded to support the 32 registrar training, which includes a range of activities as 33 well as placements into communities. So that money is 34 funded to the RACGP to deliver the education and training 35 program. 36 There are incentives for individuals. 37 For instance, in New South Wales, there are 239 GP catchment areas. 38 We are incentivising at least 40 of those catchments to ensure 39 40 that registrars have access to funding to support them 41 relocating, to support them accessing technology and infrastructure that will help them when they relocate to 42 a location in one of these targeted areas. 43 44 45 One area is Armidale. The New England area of 46 New South Wales we know is incredibly under-serviced with Moree is certainly an area that we are supporting 47 GPs.

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1 additional funding to those registrars and practices in 2 those regions. 3 4 It's a funding grant agreement from the Department of 5 Health to the RACGP. We then look at innovative approaches that are relevant and locally defined to ensure that we're 6 doing - applying approaches to make placements attractive 7 8 in the areas of greatest need. 9 10 MR MUSTON: At a time when, I gather from the evidence that we've heard already, there is a shortage of GPs or 11 a void in particular as a forward projection, a void that 12 needs to be filled, is there a dialogue between the college 13 14 and the Commonwealth about what can be done to avoid turning candidates away? 15 16 17 MS VAN DE WATER: Frequently. 18 19 MR MUSTON: How does that dialogue go? 20 21 MS VAN DE WATER: Well, you know, it is an approach to the 22 department and supported by Minister Butler thankfully this year, which was our approach that we have a number of 23 24 doctors who will be turned away if we're not able to be flexible in our approach to distribution, in our approach 25 26 to offers that are made. 27 28 We have taken up, for instance, an arrangement where 29 we have a composite pathway. So registrars entering the program may train for part of their training in an outer 30 31 metro area, but undertake a rotation into regions like New 32 England, Western New South Wales and the Murrumbidgee, for 33 instance. 34 What we're finding is that a large number of those 35 36 doctors, once they undertake a six-month placement in those towns, are more likely to stay for longer. So if we can 37 develop an interest, enable a rotation into an area of 38 greater need, we know there is an increased likelihood that 39 40 those registrars will stay for longer and often after their 41 training as well. Those are the conversations. 42 43 MR MUSTON: Can I ask you guickly, at the time of the last 44 intake and as a result of the discussions that the college 45 had with the Commonwealth ministry, were there any 46 interested candidates who had to be knocked back or was an arrangement able to be reached whereby all interested and 47

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1 suitable candidates were offered a position? 2 3 MS VAN DE WATER: So we're on the second intake at the 4 There will be a handful that will be knocked back moment. 5 and that's purely - a range of reasons behind that. When I'm talking "a handful", I'm talking about 20 at the end of 6 7 the day. We are looking at innovative approaches and 8 oversupply. 9 10 What that means is that there will be some that won't get training places in the areas that they absolutely are 11 12 committed to training in and are not willing to look at alternative arrangements to training, and in those 13 14 instances, we will have to - they won't accept an offer. They will be made an offer but they may not accept that 15 16 offer. 17 18 MR MUSTON: So just to put a practical example around 19 that, someone might be made an offer in, say, Wagga Wagga, 20 and come to the view that they don't really want to move or work in Wagga Wagga and so they will knock back that offer 21 22 because they would prefer to do something in a metro area, 23 for example? 24 MS VAN DE WATER: That's possible. 25 We find people are 26 more flexible than that in most instances but there are the odd occasions where individuals don't want to train outside 27 28 of the city. 29 I think part of your original question was DR BONNING: 30 around metro areas as well. If we dive back into that, 31 32 while I can't provide figures to you, I'm sure we could find them, about the socioeconomic determinants of 33 34 communities and therefore their access to general practice My general understanding of that area is that 35 as well. 36 areas of higher sociodemographic kind of standing, so higher SEIFA indexes, have more access to general practice. 37 38 The problem is that conversely those areas of lower 39 40 SEIFA index are also the ones the chronic disease, more 41 issues of social determinants of health where we probably need more access per capita to general practice as well, 42 and we need that access to be affordable. 43 44 45 There's a little bit of a mismatch. So even when we 46 talk about outer metro, inner metro, we've got to remember that the populations that we serve aren't just a ring 47

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1 around 15 kilometres from Sydney or from the CBD, we do 2 very much need to think about what those local regions need 3 and what they look like. The Hills district is very 4 different to - I trained down in Airds near Campbelltown 5 and that community is very different. It has verv different needs but it also really suffers from some of the 6 7 negative socioeconomic factors of the community also then 8 meaning that most - that many doctors won't or don't end up 9 practising there. 10 11 MR MUSTON: So a double whammy of social determinants of 12 health are not favouring them and the same drivers which 13 lead to the social determinants of health not favouring 14 people in a particular community will often discourage general practitioners from wanting to practise in that area 15 16 perhaps of the greatest need. 17 That's entirely correct, an excellent kind of 18 DR BONNING: 19 summation of that, and we can see that around the world. 20 So the general view, and it's well backed-up 21 internationally, is that when you have a cohort of medical 22 practitioners - that's not just GPs, that's cardiologists and nephrologists and surgeons and what-not - the overall 23 health of your community gets better the more generalists 24 25 vou have. 26 27 The more the focus becomes on a sub-specialty and a 28 hyper sub-specialty or sub-sub-specialty, the more likely 29 you are to have significantly increased costs with overall health outcomes that are, for the community, worse. 30 31 32 The reason we know that is because generalists and 33 generalism is often about looking after the whole person, and when you do that, you find a lot of the things that 34 35 lead to lots of the reasons why you might have the need for 36 a sub-sub-specialist. None of us are just our left ventricle plus our right foot plus one of the vessels in 37 The thing I need you to 38 our brain; we are a whole person. do is exercise and eat better, and those things will have 39 40 significant benefits for your right foot, your left 41 ventricle, and the vessel in your brain. 42 Again, the evidence is there to talk about that. 43 The 44 Commonwealth funds put out their kind of league table of 10 45 relatively comparable nations. It includes Australia, UK, 46 Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, amongst others, and still rates Australia as the best performing 47

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system in the world. Part of that is because of access to 1 2 general practice, but general practice being a useful 3 coordinator and central player in the delivery of services, 4 because of that need to recognise that the person who walks 5 in, the one we always love in practice - the person who walks in with fatigue is more complicated than most people 6 It is not, "Oh, I'm tired", because tiredness can 7 think. 8 come from probably 15 different systems and have 9 significant impacts, and that actually needs to be worked 10 out in the context of the individual through a conversation and understanding, rather than, "Oh, well, we just need to 11 do this procedure", or, "We just need to start this drug." 12 13 14 I think that's just a ringing endorsement, at an international level, of how Australia performs both because 15 16 we sit in the middle of the pack of OECD when it comes to 17 spending on health care, but we actually sit at the top of 18 that particular tree, from the Commonwealth fund, in terms 19 of health outcomes. But there's inequity in the system. 20 21 MR MUSTON: In terms of the challenges that we've been 22 talking about, maldistribution sounds like it's part of the problem, but is it not just maldistribution, it is also not 23 24 enough GPs system-wide to meet the primary care needs of the population of New South Wales as it currently stands? 25 26 Would that be a fair assessment or are there enough GPs but 27 they're just not in the right place? 28 29 DR HOFFMAN: I would also just add to that, it is not just 30 GPs; it is across the whole primary care workforce. There's not enough nurses, there's not enough allied 31 32 health, there's not enough pharmacists, there is not enough 33 of one individual specialty to serve the entire population 34 of New South Wales. 35 36 DR BONNING: So your comparator - you might think about New Zealand is about four and a half, 37 New Zealand. five million people, so it's a bit smaller than us. 38 They've done actually really well in developing their 39 40 general practice workforce. They've paid much higher rates 41 to get general practice, and they've hit a different 42 problem. 43 44 MR MUSTON: Just pausing there. New Zealand, I think, is 45 a capitated model. Is my understanding correct? 46 It is a different system, but the problem 47 DR BONNING:

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that I want to recognise in all of this is if you focus on 1 what is a very complex system - if you focus on just one 2 3 part of it, often forgetting the other bits, we end up with 4 these patients who are too sick for general practice, so 5 they're too complex for us to manage, they take up a huge 6 amount of time, they are not sick enough or acutely unwell enough for the emergency department, and they can't afford 7 8 a private specialist and there is no access to public 9 sub-specialty medicine.

So getting in to see the public nephrologist, you 11 might as well wait, you know, six months. That then 12 13 becomes, well, it's the same as almost not having someone, 14 because I need someone within three weeks for a patient 15 Then you end up with, as Mr Sloane was talking somewhere. 16 about, this scenario where people come via the emergency 17 department, when they have acutely deteriorated, for 18 something that was otherwise manageable with a little bit 19 of input.

One of the things that's in my witness statement is about some different programs that exist out there to try and intervene, whether it's in paediatrics, whether it's the SUSTAIN program, which is useful, but lots of the ability to get advice, to get support is also what augments general practice to actually do its job really well.

28 Two minutes on the phone with a psychiatrist on Monday 29 gave me a plan for someone who is at the point in their 30 depression where they are becoming apathetic, they can't 31 work, they are unable to get out of bed. Rather than see 32 the public psychiatrist, who wouldn't be able to see them 33 for months, being able to talk to the public psychiatrist 34 for two minutes, here's a plan, I can initiate that management plan, I can follow up every week with this 35 36 person or, you know, on the phone tomorrow, as I'm going 37 to.

That has meant that he will not end up in a situation 39 40 where he is an emergency presentation, maybe with a very 41 serious outcome, hopefully, because we'll keep close tabs We have, you know, a good relationship with him, 42 on him. 43 but also we've used the psychiatrist for the top end of 44 their spectrum of knowledge. They know this patient, 45 they've met them before and they are then able to say, 46 "Here are some things that might work. Work your way Talk to us in two or three months. If you 47 through those.

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1 need us sooner, here is the number to call." 2 3 The patient you just gave an example THE COMMISSIONER: 4 of, absent the kind of interventions you just talked about, 5 is that an example of someone who is in that gap between what you said was too sick for general practice but not 6 sick enough for acute care? 7 8 DR BONNING: 9 Yes, he is --10 THE COMMISSIONER: And what more should I understand by 11 12 that concept? 13 14 DR BONNING: As I am sitting at a wooden table, it's very He will hopefully not present to an emergency 15 useful. 16 He does not have the kind of features of his department. 17 melancholic depression that predispose him to suicidality. However, he can't work, he can't do anything else. 18 He's 19 living with his mother at the moment, so it's making - you 20 know, it is a real drain on her ability to work. There are 21 some complicated things here. 22 23 He is someone who would show up to an emergency 24 department not because they were, you know, in extremis, but because they just can't function anymore and they just 25 26 need access to a practitioner. They just need someone really smart in psychiatry, and that's what we borrow in 27 28 general practice all the time. We borrow the minds of others to help us with a complex person who has lots of 29 30 needs. 31 32 That is always - I think that is always one of our 33 greatest skills as well, is working out when - I've known 34 this gentleman for years. This is probably the second time I've called the psychiatrist in five years, and all 35 36 I needed was two minutes. He's doing something, you know, in the consulting room, I'm speaking to the psychiatrist. 37 We move on. We are efficient. 38 39 40 He has hope now because I've spoken to someone else. 41 We're not magicians, but certainly our patients need to know and feel like we're throwing everything we can at 42 43 helping them at a time that's really dark for them, and 44 even knowing that we can call and speak to the 45 psychiatrist, he's more hopeful now about where his life's 46 going to go, and that's a big deal in that kind of illness. 47

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1 MR MUSTON: Just in that example, your ability to speak to 2 the psychiatrist, was that because there is a pre-existing 3 networked system or arrangement whereby you could do that 4 or is it because you happen to have attended university or 5 something with that person or some other connection which 6 is ad hoc and serendipitous?

8 DR BONNING: This is a great psychiatrist who will provide 9 his mobile number to GPs. Recognising that, again, I've 10 called him twice in five years, he would much prefer that than seeing one of his patients, who he does care - you 11 12 know, or seeing someone who could have been prevented from needing to see him in an emergency department. So I spoke 13 14 to him, and it was a public day for him so he was available to take the call. But most of that is very patchy and it 15 16 is not systematised. We know that when we do systematise 17 these things, it gives someone like me, who is fairly 18 gregarious and able to get people's phone numbers - it's But there are many GPs for whom those 19 helpful for me. 20 networks aren't as easy to access, and I'm lucky, he's 21 lucky that we had that in the moment, but there are plenty 22 of patients for whom I don't have that either.

MR MUSTON: Dr Christmas, you have raised your hand. Do you have a rural perspective on the way these networks work in your practice?

28 DR CHRISTMAS: I agree wholeheartedly with what I do. 29 Dr Bonning has said about that slipping through the gaps the patients who are sick, not sick enough to go to an 30 31 emergency department, can't afford a private specialist. 32 That is my whole population here, really. We have no 33 public clinics, or minimal public clinics, in our hospitals 34 in Wagga and Griffith, which are my nearest centres. There are a few, but they're sparse and oversubscribed, and, you 35 36 know, to get someone into a renal physician in the next 37 three months would be heaven. It is two years to get into I can't manage someone with progressive 38 our neurologist. neurological things. As good as I might be as a GP, I'm 39 40 not that clever. We do need these specialists, and their 41 hands are tied because they are doing their best as well.

43 So access and looking after patients who are on that 44 fringe of how sick are they and when do we escalate their 45 care to the hospital system is a really delicate area. 46 I think GPs get very good skills and rurally we have to get 47 more proficient at dealing with sicker patients, because

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we're looking after the heart failures who can't get into
the cardiologist; we're looking at the respiratory
patients, working them up, doing as much as we can. I
think there is little systemic support for accessing
specialist care but we use our network a lot.

7 One of the advantages of being rural is that we build 8 those networks with our specialist colleagues. I have my 9 favourite specialists that I speak to on speed dial, just 10 about. They know me, and whether they roll their eyes when 11 I'm calling or not - they never seem to when I speak to 12 them, so that's nice.

14 But, you know, you call in a favour. "Mr So-and-so that you saw three months ago, can your secretary get the 15 notes? This, this, this is going on." I can say that my 16 17 specialty colleagues are really very helpful, most of the time, because they understand that if we do our job well, 18 we support them better, and they know they're sending the 19 20 patients back to being looked after well in general 21 practice, which is reducing their re-presentation to 22 hospital and so on. 23

So that primary/secondary care, non-GP specialist/ GP specialist interrelationship, is incredibly important in looking after our patients, especially as general practice gets more complex.

This is my second point. I think the nature of 29 general practice is changing. We have increasing 30 complexity around management. If we look at diabetes and 31 32 the number of drugs that we now have for diabetes and the 33 considerations around renal disease, around heart disease 34 and heart failure and diabetes and the medications used to manage that, the comorbidities that occur with these 35 36 illnesses.

So what used to be someone just went along 40 years ago until they had their heart attack and then you put them on a statin, that's not what happens these days. It's all about identifying people early, treating them early with lots of different ways of treatment.

44 So general practice is becoming incredibly complex. 45 So we need to be getting better and better at dealing with 46 more and more in more detail. I think the corollary of 47 that is that a lot of people are removing themselves -

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1 anecdotally, I don't have the data on this - from the 2 coalface of general practice and the actual general general 3 practice that we see and sub-specialising. So you'll see 4 a lot of GPs getting into, "I do women's health general practice", "I do menopausal general practice", "I do drug 5 and alcohol general practice", or, "I sub-specialise in 6 mental health." That's not to say that those aren't 7 8 valuable areas to work in but it removes GPs from doing 9 general practice. 10 It's sometimes a very thankless job and not 11 particularly sexy. If you're going to look at what people 12 want to do, managing someone's chronic ulcers when they've 13 14 got heart failure may not be the nicest job but it is actually really important. 15 16 17 So I think we are diluting the number of GPs that we 18 have doing the general practice because it's actually really hard work and you need to know a lot and you're 19 20 trying to work with many different systems with a lot of 21 shortfalls. 22 Dr Hoffman, is the anecdotal experience of the 23 MR MUSTON: 24 sub-specialisation of general practice consistent with your 25 observation? 26 27 DR HOFFMAN: I have a few points, apologies. Not only is 28 that happening, but there's also really good evidence that that is good for general practice. There is good evidence 29 out of Adelaide that diversification and sub-specialisation 30 31 of general practice means that GPs are more likely to stay 32 in the workforce for longer. The GPs who do have their 33 special interest or their thing that they get really, 34 really good at - and that might be children's health, that might be writing novels, that might be educating the 35 36 public, that might be professional general practice and the business of general practice - actually are more likely to 37 stay in the workforce for longer. 38 39 40 Your point previously for Dr Bonning in regards to, 41 "Was it a friend that you called or was it the hospital advice line", with psychiatry, there actually are some 42 43 really good systems that you don't have to call a friend. 44 There is a GP advice line where GPs can directly call a psychiatrist to get advice, but it's only in that 45 46 specialty. That's something, if that was replicated out to other specialties, would be enormously beneficial to GPs. 47

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If we could call and not get put through to the intern, the most junior on the renal team, and actually speak to a renal physician, then that would be fabulous. So, yes, that exists for some specialties but not all specialties.

6 If I dare take his example a little bit further - and 7 I do see a lot of mental health patients - yes, it's 8 probably going to be Michael who calls up tomorrow to check 9 that the patient is okay and he will probably call them 10 once a week ongoing until they are past this acute crisis, but I would actually argue, does it need to be Michael 11 12 calling tomorrow? Does it need to be him next week and the 13 week after and the week after that? Realistically, 14 Medicare says yes, because otherwise there's no patient rebate, and unless he, Michael, physically calls him, 15 16 no-one's getting paid for that time. But ideally, it's 17 not.

19 We work in a multidisciplinary team. I would far 20 rather it was my practice nurse who made that phone call, 21 or someone who was trained in mental health, to be able to 22 go, "Are you okay? How did you sleep last night? Do you need an appointment with your doctor this week? Can I call 23 24 you again tomorrow and check in?" That doesn't need to be 25 me, and it probably shouldn't be me. It shouldn't be me, 26 and that's why I will stay at work until 10 o'clock at 27 night to make sure I've ticked all those boxes and made 28 sure everyone's okay, but I would much rather we did that 29 as a team-based approach.

- MR MUSTON: I see general nodding from all of the clinicians on the panel on that one. I take that as a yes.
- MR SLOANE: Sorry, Mr Muston, can I bring you back to your original question?
- 37 MR MUSTON: Please do.

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I haven't referenced it in my witness 39 MR SLOANE: 40 statement, but the distribution question, it's probably 41 good just to have it on record, there is a paper - and I would have to dig it out to find it - on a very affluent 42 43 suburb, it is related to MBS funding and where it's spread, 44 so a very affluent suburb of Sydney. In this particular 45 study it showed that the MBS spend per person was \$900, 46 whereas in rural, regional and remote areas it was somewhere in the realm of \$300 to \$350 per person. 47

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2 There can be assumptions drawn, and there were from 3 this paper, around that distribution and access, more than 4 anything - perhaps workforce shortages or otherwise. 5 I don't think it's any narrative at all on general practice, because I think some of the things that have been 6 7 said, at the moment - I did jot down a note - I think it 8 really needs to be mentioned that there is a dramatic 9 under-appreciation of what general practice does, 10 especially in the defined rural, regional and remote areas, 11 because, as you've heard here, you know, in the city, they 12 are very much that, similarly, integrated sort of anchor for care for all patients that are actually seen, but in 13 14 the rural, regional and remote areas, they're quite often not only doing that but also then putting on their other 15 16 superhero suit and doing the same thing at the hospital. 17

Everything I've learned from the interface between NSW Health and general practice in rural, regional and remote areas - not just in the work that they do in the New South Wales public health system but also in that private practice setting - is actually phenomenal. So I want that to be heard.

I think there are three points, just following up from 25 26 I can't remember whether Dr Bonning or Dr Hoffman that. 27 said this, but those incentives - and I'm sure you've 28 talked about incentives a fair bit during the hearings -29 there is that other side of, and I think Dr Hoffman has touched on it a little bit, around those other incentives 30 31 around that sub-specialisation, and I know Dr Christmas 32 said so too - that is that change in workforce that we 33 talked about at the start of today's proceedings around 34 what is that attraction or the pull for people to come to? It is not just that 100 per cent hands-on work anymore, it 35 36 is a blend of teaching, research, university appointments, 37 some virtual care, and we've seen that and we've heard about models like the vRGS, because I know you've seen that 38 But that blended model of that and hands on or 39 at Dubbo. 40 that and the sub-specialisation for GPs is what is keeping 41 them in some of these communities.

I will just note there is no funding mechanism at the
moment, when we talk about those referrals to
psychiatrists, specialists, the cardiologists and the
neurologists, to leave the hospital to come and work with
the GPs on the ground or take those phone calls. It is

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1 very relational. 2 3 I was about to say, there's something in my DR BONNING: 4 statement about some models that are already up and 5 running, but we will talk about them. 6 7 MR SLOANE: There have been some really successful pilots 8 that we have seen, whether it be diabetic endocrinology 9 consultants going out and working with general practice to 10 lower HBA1C, diabetes risk levels, down for whole communities and whole suburbs, whether it be city or 11 12 regional. But there's no real mechanism for that to happen under the current MBS scheduling, and reiterating around, 13 14 you know, Commonwealth responsibility around primary care where really, in regional, rural and remote areas, the blur 15 16 of the line between that and our reliance on it from a 17 NSW Health perspective is absolutely pivotal. 18 19 I just wanted to touch on virtual models around 20 There is a bit of a reliance to do that, and connecting. 21 that's becoming a more accepted model for regional patients 22 to be able to link in with general practice, to team up and do a virtual consult, but there is always the need for that 23 24 hands-on or that face-to-face consult in the first instance for specialty care, but that is far more becoming the 25 26 workaround, and the specialists are just not available in 27 regional areas. 28 29 MR MUSTON: Just pausing there, I will maybe invite the clinicians to accept or reject this proposition, but 30 31 whether it's fly-in/fly-out or something that's delivered 32 virtually, there is an important difference, isn't there, 33 between a metro-based specialist who flies in to save the 34 day on the one hand, as opposed to a metro-based specialist 35 who contributes their time, either in person or virtually, 36 to form part of a proper multidisciplinary team, including a general practitioner, including potentially practice 37 nurses, who will be delivering all-round care to the 38 patient such that each of them is delivering care at the 39 40 top of their scope and of the type that is needed? 41 42 DR BONNING: This comes not from my general practice role, 43 it comes from my previous role with the Australian Medical 44 Association here in New South Wales, but it is the 45 understanding of the practitioner, so a sub-specialty 46 practitioner, who contributes to care is part of it, and 47 understanding what the resources and capacity is in the

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1 community as well to maintain or to put and execute on the 2 management plan that is in place. You know, as 3 Dr Christmas was saying, do we have an exercise 4 physiologist, do we have a dietician, do we have a diabetes 5 educator, you know, those kinds of things that, for one of our most common conditions, diabetes, all of those things 6 7 are very, very important. So if you've got someone who has 8 a transactional relationship with a community, that's 9 tricky, because all of those things sound good in principle 10 but they can't be enacted, and so the person's care doesn't go anywhere. Whereas if you get, you know, models of care, 11 12 and I'm both referring to one that's in my witness statement around SUSTAIN, which is a pilot but very good, 13 14 it's around paediatric care, it's around having two general paediatricians available across a heap of practices for 15 16 co-consultation, we write to them with some notes and say, 17 you know, "What do we do next?"; we get help. We do 18 teaching and education with them. It's running this year, 19 it's very useful, and I believe the Commission has received 20 a separate stand-alone submission regarding that program 21 from another practitioner who is involved.

But there is also a really interesting virtual program that runs from Austin Hospital in Melbourne, so outside of our jurisdiction obviously. It's around cardiac care, it's about getting people home, it's about using not just the virtual consultation model but remote monitoring.

29 There is a product called Biobeat, which you can stick to the skin, it drops off after about seven days, it gives 30 31 intermittent monitoring. Someone who would otherwise be in 32 a hospital bed, which is very expensive, and also a long 33 way from home, can be at home, can be supported by their GP 34 with virtual long-term relationships with the cardiologists 35 and cardiothoracics teams that are involved, and we know 36 that that is both good for the health system down there, financially it's very good; it's good for the patients 37 because they get home sooner; and it doesn't seem to have, 38 at this point, had any adverse outcomes, so people get home 39 40 soon and they do well.

We know that through other models, Hospital in the Home, virtual care models - all of those are pathways that we try and use but in a consistent fashion, because just having someone come out is not the same as having - so that is a person-based response, and Dr Christmas was talking about that earlier. Rather than having it about a person,

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1 it needs to be about a system that supports care and that 2 recognises and understands what local capacity is so that 3 you're using whatever exists on the ground, which could be 4 GPs, it could be nurses, it could be allied health 5 professionals, to the best of their ability, wherever you happen to be, whether that's metro or regional. 6 7 8 MR MUSTON: We've touched on --9 THE COMMISSIONER: 10 Before we move on, can I just make sure I have understood something Mr Sloane said a moment ago. 11 12 13 You were talking about one of the pilots for diabetes, bringing down diabetes risk levels and there being no 14 mechanism for that to happen under the MBS, you then said: 15 16 17 There's no real mechanism for that to happen under the current MBS scheduling, 18 19 and reiterating around, you know, 20 *Commonwealth responsibility around primary* 21 care where really, in regional, rural and 22 remote areas, the blur of the line between that and our reliance on it from a 23 24 NSW Health perspective is absolutely 25 pivotal. 26 Tell me if I'm wrong, do I understand that to be in the 27 28 circumstances where, particularly in regional, rural and 29 remote areas, NSW Health is actually doing things or funding things that you would call primary care, as 30 distinct from the Commonwealth, or were you making 31 32 a different point? 33 34 MR SLOANE: No, I would say that that is exactly the point 35 I'm making. Not only that --36 37 THE COMMISSIONER: I thought it was. That's why I nodded when you were talking, but I thought I had better 38 double-check. 39 40 41 MR SLOANE: Perhaps without remuneration from the Commonwealth in order to do so, yes. I can elaborate on 42 43 that if you want me to. 44 45 THE COMMISSIONER: Please do if you want to. 46 47 MR SLOANE: I think we have worked through keen

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collaboration with the Commonwealth across a couple of 1 2 different initiatives with regards to remuneration for 3 exercises like that. We have 185 facilities across 4 regional New South Wales, some bigger than others, 5 including the likes of Dubbo, Wagga, et cetera, but there are many that are much smaller than that. We've got 6 7 I think 66, I want to say, multi-purpose services where we 8 absolutely are relying on. There's no specialist doctor 9 that's a specialist in MPS doctoring, we absolutely rely on 10 general practice, from the town, and quite often they're split between private practice and providing a GP VMO 11 model. 12 13

14 In many of those instances, we are working with the GPs in town and the MPS to seek section 19(2) Insurance Act 15 16 exemption under the Act in order to allow that doctor to be 17 able to perform those activities and their own private 18 practice billings but then also bill under the MBS scheme 19 and then enable a reinvestment, so we can reinvest in locum 20 employment if that doctor needs to go on annual leave, God 21 forbid.

Those are successful schemes. 23 We do that in a lot of 24 places, but there are places where, unless the local health 25 district is providing a salaried model - and you would have 26 heard about the 4Ts model when you went to another version 27 of a single employer model - unless they are providing that 28 and providing that stability and salaried model for that 29 general practitioner, it would be very difficult to attract someone there. 30

32 It's the balance between - let's not forget, as has 33 been mentioned today, in 90 per cent of these, they are 34 very small businesses in rural and regional areas, general practices, and they've got to be a successful and fiscally 35 36 viable private businesses. Sometimes the volume - vou talk 37 about the books being closed at 1,000, 2,000 patients in some areas, there's a lot of areas where that's not the 38 case and the volume from an MBS billing point of view 39 40 doesn't make it a viable scenario. I'm not sure if 41 Dr Hoffman or Dr Bonning would back me up, but it does not 42 make that a viable way.

I mentioned it in my witness statement around salaried medical positions. You know, currently as the NHRA itself is being negotiated, we are embarking on some pilots where there is a pool of funding from the Commonwealth at the

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1 moment to perhaps provide some innovative pilots with 2 regards to block or salary funded primary care general 3 practice roles or nurse practitioner led models in certain 4 towns where there's thin or failing markets or totally 5 failed markets that we need to build back up. 6 7 I think there are, from a NSW Health perspective, 8 a lot of areas where they have, either on contract through 9 the Royal Flying Doctor Service or through other private 10 general practice arrangements, salaried or become the single employer for a GP to ensure that that community or 11 communities have access to general practice. 12 13 14 Whilst we still access the 19(2) exemptions to be able to remunerate that and that billing gets reinvested 15 16 through that, the primary care model in the town, it's not 17 exactly optimal. 18 THE COMMISSIONER: It's still a cost to New South Wales. 19 20 21 MR SLOANE: Yes. I don't think - I'm happy to be 22 corrected on the record into the future but I don't think the primary healthcare networks necessarily have the fiscal 23 24 levers to do that at all from their commissioning model. 25 specifically with regards to salarying GPs. I don't 26 necessarily see it working like that, but NSW Health, 27 because we rely on those doctors, responsibility falls with 28 us as well to provide a GP VMO and someone to see at 29 hospital when they present to emergency, so that does 30 happen. 31 32 Describing failing markets out there, and DR BONNING: 33 there are some, I think it's important to recognise it's 34 much cheaper to intervene - Mr Sloane does this a lot more than I do - before it becomes a failed market, like 35 36 building something up from where there's nothing anymore is 37 incredibly expensive. We say about cost to the health system or to NSW Health, and what they need to spend to 38 support or do some of those things or have GP VMOs in their 39 40 hospitals, but on the flip side, if the primary care model 41 fails, then the flow-through to the hospitals is probably many times more expensive. So, you know, I think we've got 42 to be intervening earlier or sooner otherwise the model 43 44 really, if it does fail, then it's very expensive to 45 rebuild. 46 MR MUSTON: We will come back to the intervention in just 47

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1 a moment.

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3 MR SLOANE: Sorry, can I make one more comment?

5 MR MUSTON: Please do.

Just off the back of that as well, there are 7 MR SLOANE: 8 many towns - this is a fine line, I think this is where 9 I talk about the rubbing up against that line of need. 10 There are quite a few towns where - and rightly so because of the workforce model change or the life/work balance of 11 12 the general practitioner being preserved - they no longer provide a visiting medical officer service to the hospital. 13 14 We still have an obligation from a NSW Health perspective to have a doctor on site. 15

17 We could talk about some of the casual medical workforce that we access to do that, which again, coming 18 19 back to Dr Bonning's point, can sometimes be very 20 expensive, but we're also quite cautious in that scenario 21 that if we do that and have a medical officer in the 22 facility, that sometimes can affect the private practice in 23 the town. It's a very fine line to walk between the 24 balance of making sure we're preserving that general practice's business as a small business, as that resource 25 26 to the town, purely from the primary care point of view.

28 I think their personal choice not to attend or visit 29 the hospital is absolutely warranted, they can always make that, I don't think there's anyone around that would 30 31 question that or think that there was any sort of 32 obligation to do that. However, we have to be very aware 33 that if we do employ someone via the Rural Doctors' 34 Settlement Package to the hospital, purely as a VMO without private practice, that can and might affect the primary 35 36 care business in town.

We've seen that happen in many towns where a new or large conglomerate general practice might roll into town and set up business and the effects that that has had on perhaps a longstanding smaller private practice in regional New South Wales.

It's very much worth mentioning, because they are some
of the collateral damages from us needing to provide that
locum service through the public health system at the
hospital, and being quite cognisant of current bulk billing

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policy and bulk billing arrangements, its impact on where
people present to and the impacts then on that private
practice again causing what could be that private practice
to fail because people are presenting to the emergency
before going to the primary care practice.

7 THE COMMISSIONER: Is an example of what you were talking 8 about before, where you might get access - New South Wales 9 might - NSW Health or the practitioner engaged by 10 NSW Health might get access to the MBS but there is still a primary care cost to NSW Health - Bowraville, I think, 11 12 was a place we visited where there's a net cost to New South Wales for providing the GP and other primary care 13 14 services at that care facility where the GP has retired?

16 MR SLOANE: Yes, exactly. And then the 19(2) exemption 17 only allows us to reinvest that in the primary care 18 practice - I think I outlined that in my first statement in April - to certain items with regards to the primary 19 20 care practice, which is great because it does then allow us 21 to invest that in the locum setting so the general practice 22 can take leave or otherwise, and we've had quite successful reinvestment in some areas where the community has done 23 24 But again, it's limited as to what it can be that. 25 reinvested in or subsidised salary for that doctor.

27 I think just on that, and I know I bang on a lot about 28 the single employer model and the rural generalist single 29 employer, our main focus in New South Wales was to really maintain that focus on general practice and private 30 31 practice in these smaller towns. Sure, salaried benefiting 32 the hospital, of course, but we're extremely cognisant of 33 this model and setting it up and making sure that we're 34 investing in primary care and private practice for general practice rather than a hospitalist model. 35

MR MUSTON: I will come to you in a moment, Dr Christmas, I can see your hand is up.

40 Could I just ask a quick question about Bowraville 41 while we touch on it. My memory of the evidence, and I 42 will be corrected very quickly if it's wrong, is that the 43 shortfall to the state is something in the order of 44 \$400,000 a year.

46 THE COMMISSIONER: I thought it was \$300,000, but it was 47 given in evidence.

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2 MR MUSTON: Ballpark.

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4 MR SLOANE: I'm not aware of the exact figure of the 5 shortfall but I think if we look at any of the small sites for New South Wales public health across the system with 6 7 regards to aged care, and I guess some of the community 8 service obligation and this economies of scale, there's 9 a significant gap between the funding that is provided for 10 the Commonwealth in order to continue day rates in aged care as well as provide what, in a lot of small towns, is 11 12 the equivalent of primary care function for the patients that work in to the - and I might use inverted commas, 13 "emergency departments", where we're seeing the profile of 14 primary care patients presenting for less than nominal, you 15 16 know, injury or illness.

MR MUSTON: It's less economically efficient to be
 treating those patients in an emergency setting than it
 would be in a good primary care GP clinic type setting.

22 MR SLOANE: Absolutely, and I think it's probably worth mentioning at the moment that there is a small town in the 23 24 Hunter New England, just near to Narrabri, where the GP 25 practice is doing a swimmingly good job looking after the 26 community there. There is significant pressure for the 27 You would have heard about Wee Waa local health district. 28 There is significant pressure to the local health already. 29 district to re-open the hospital to its former glory, sorry 30 to use colloquialisms.

32 In order to do so, we would have to be paying 33 a significant amount, as requested by the general 34 practitioner that was being negotiated with, in order to do 35 that, which is out of lockstep with fiscal strategy at the 36 moment for NSW Health, and we're talking about a hospital 37 that has less than three presentations per day, that are low and very low acuity and has an occupancy - well, now 38 they're only working in the daylight hours, but when they 39 40 were open, had an occupancy of less than three people per 41 24-hour period. 42

43 MR MUSTON: Good primary care service delivered in that
44 town would reduce those presentations.
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46 MR SLOANE: That GP is doing a phenomenal job.

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That's Dr Bonning's point about the 1 THE COMMISSIONER: 2 benefits of having a GP practice in a regional town taking 3 the pressure off public hospital EDs. I suppose that cost 4 to New South Wales of \$300,000 or \$400,000, you would need 5 an economist to work it out for you, but there would be a saving from avoidable hospital presentations and maybe 6 7 also just general population health benefits. 8 9 MR MUSTON: And that assumes we walk into the trap that 10 Dr Bonning urges us to avoid, which is viewing this economically --11 12 13 THE COMMISSIONER: Exactly. 14 15 MR MUSTON: -- trying to compare savings in the health 16 system with expense in the health system. If one says 17 a good primary clinic in, say, Bowraville, reduces 18 presentations in the emergency department, there is an 19 actual hard saving in the health system, which might even 20 eclipse \$300,000 - you'd have to do the numbers. If you 21 add to that the potential benefits of someone who is able 22 to remain in the workforce because their elderly parent can continue to care for a child, for example, it's small 23 24 beans, the \$300,000 to \$400,000. 25 26 While I note Dr Christmas has her hand up, DR BONNING: just to finish that thought, as we hear, there are certain 27 28 small communities where, you know, we probably had a hospital there for historical reasons and only for 29 30 historical reasons. There are probably, you know, certain 31 economies of scale you need to reach before deciding 32 whether running a hospital in a community, versus someone needing to go 20 kilometres up the road, you know, is 33 34 I would imagine that that's the kind of financial viable. 35 calculus that the health department needs to do to work 36 those things out. 37 It's a financial calculus that would 38 MR MUSTON: 39 comfortably be managed if you were making a decision about 40 whether or not to build a new very small hospital in a 41 relatively small town, but where you have one already there, one has to overlay a political calculus which 42 43 changes the dynamics somewhat; is that right Mr Sloane? 44 45 MR SLOANE: I think there are many aspects to add to that. 46 If you do build a hospital and set up a service there, it's the volume from a safety and quality point of view to the 47

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practitioners - and I'm not just talking medical, for 1 2 everyone working there. We've seen that play out in 3 Wee Waa where the volume is low, it has been low since 4 before 2013. We have seen nurses move to other hospitals, 5 the doctors are less inclined to take postings up there 6 because the volume there to not only maintain practice, 7 maintain a fellowship and maintain their skill levels, 8 outside of rotating into other areas in order to do so, is 9 just not there. It's probably not interesting work, 10 I could imagine, and that's definitely the feedback that we've had from clinicians that have moved 25 kilometres up 11 12 the road. So it's very, very tricky, but then it becomes quite a discussion around equity of access and shift of 13 14 risk, I think, yes. 15

- 16 MR MUSTON: Dr Christmas, you've had your hand up for 17 a while. I know you put it up to comment in relation to 18 the discussion around providing primary care through 19 a public facility in a town and the impact on private 20 business, but I know you also have something, based on your 21 earlier evidence, to tell us about the risk of taking 22 services out of hospitals and the deskilling effect that that can have on GP VMOs. 23
- 25 DR CHRISTMAS: Yes, that's right. But I guess my point -26 it has moved on somewhat in the conversation since I first 27 thought of this - is slightly tangential. I think one of 28 the things we need to be aware of is that, in our rural 29 areas, a lot of the GPs in small towns are overseas trained and a lot of them have not worked in the Australian 30 31 hospital system. 32
- What that means is that they are not credentialled to work within our emergency departments in these small towns. So one of the things that is a barrier is actually getting them into the hospital system to allow them to train up in our system, so then they can actually provide services, be credentialled to be VMOs in small country hospitals.

40 That's something that is an area for potential growth, 41 and I think there is a program somewhere in New South Wales where that has happened, where they've trained up some -42 43 it's just in the back of my mind at the moment, I can't 44 think of the exact details, but where we allow GPs from 45 overseas to spend time in our hospitals to learn that 46 system so then when they do go out into our communities in rural areas, they actually are able to work as GP VMOs, 47

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1 which is often what they want to do because they have 2 skills from other countries that they can then apply. 3 4 MR MUSTON: One thing, turning to the solutions to some of 5 these problems, and in particular a solution which seems to commonly be offered up to deal with the increase in 6 7 presentations in emergency departments, is the urgent care 8 clinic or the concept of an urgent care clinic. Could I perhaps invite whichever of you wants to go first to fire 9 10 away to express a view on --11 12 DR HOFFMAN: I'm very happy to go first. They are both 13 looking towards me. 14 -- whether an urgent care clinic is a solution 15 MR MUSTON: 16 to the real problem or whether it;s dealing with a symptom 17 of the real problem? 18 19 DR HOFFMAN: I think urgent care clinics are incredibly 20 They are clinics that see also very low numbers, costly. 21 not low numbers compared to ED, but most urgent care 22 centres around Australia are seeing less than 30 patients 23 a day, and at a cost of somewhere \$200 and \$250 per 24 service, so they are very expensive services and very low 25 volume. 26 27 Where we have seen places where they don't have urgent 28 care centres and they have actually ingrained that back 29 into general practice, so the north coast - and Wagga's about to start one similarly - we actually see patients 30 31 that are seen by their usual practice. GPs absolutely can 32 do urgent care. We're trained in urgent care. And the 33 ability to not silo urgent care to a separate location but 34 to do it with their practice who knows them, who knows their social history, their financial history, knows so 35 36 much more about them than someone who has never met them 37 before, isn't only a cost saving, it is also often the preferred option for the patient. 38 39 40 DR BONNING: The document I might direct you to is -41 in Western Sydney they spent two or three years working out a model of urgent care services. I use that term 42 43 specifically rather than "urgent care centres". Because 44 their idea was, there is a single front door, which 45 Dr Amith Shetty and others have talked about, Dr Walid 46 Jamal, Dr Kean-Seng Lim, all of whom are very across this, have talked about, which is the idea that someone finds 47

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1 their way into the system and then there is a way to, you 2 know, appropriately direct them but also - and that comes 3 to a number of resources that exist, whether it is 4 Healthdirect, whether it's nursing triage lines, whether 5 it's other services, but it uses the capacity that exists 6 in a community and also recognises that, you know, I, as someone - I served for guite a while in the Royal 7 8 Australian Navy, deployed overseas, I'm pretty comfortable 9 with stuff that happens, but that's my style of practice, 10 you know. There are others who would be less comfortable with that and so you use the resources you have. 11 12 Fractures, great, I'm happy to see that in practice, but 13 someone else may not be.

If we think about New South Wales, we've got about 15 16 3,000 general practices, at best we're maybe going to have 17 100 urgent care clinics. So it's much more - and I recognise this because of where some of the funding comes 18 19 from - if you look at it from an emergency department 20 presentation, where a non-admitted emergency patient costs 21 about \$600, \$700, a \$200 urgent care rather than showing up 22 to the hospital is good investment because otherwise it's costly somewhere else, but compared to an \$82 bulk billed 23 24 appointment in general practice, you know, 20 to 40 minutes with me, plus or minus the nurse and others in our 25 26 practice, the economies look very different depending on 27 which perspective you have.

The challenge is also that you need to then have -29 because if you use a service-based approach, you have 30 31 a capacity in a community or in a region, as opposed to 32 "I have stood up X number of clinicians, practitioners, who 33 will sit at a site and see as many people who come through 34 the door." So that, you know, by definition is somewhat inefficient, whereas your ability to use what exists out 35 36 there - and also, hopefully, to connect people back to their regular GP. We function in our practice that if you 37 call, we will work out a way for you to be seen, because 38 the nurse will talk to you, and our nurse, who probably 39 40 knows you better than we do, because she's there every day 41 of the week and I'm not, will work out a way in which you 42 can be seen by someone who knows you.

44 That is far more useful most of the time than many 45 other things. A patient of ours who has a portacath for 46 their chemotherapy had something left in that portacath, so 47 in-dwelling in this portacath. A portacath is beneath the

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1 skin's surface. It's not really supposed to have things 2 communicating with it from the outside. It's a high risk 3 then for infection. I also didn't know how to use this 4 thing, but, you know, our nurses do. That's someone who 5 otherwise would have presented back to an emergency department who can very easily be seen in general practice. 6 It took us five minutes. We literally just had to work out 7 8 what was the contraption sticking into the portacath and 9 how to get it out. Otherwise they would have sat as 10 a category five triage patient in an emergency department for a few hours until someone got around to dealing with 11 it. 12 13 14 MR MUSTON: Do you have a view on urgent care clinics/centres, Mr Sloane? 15 16 Sorry, when we're talking about "urgent 17 THE COMMISSIONER: care clinics/centres", urgent care clinics, we're talking 18 about the Commonwealth funded urgent care clinics. 19 We're 20 not talking about urgent care services - what are they 21 called, services --22 MR MUSTON: There's a subtle distinction 23 24 25 THE COMMISSIONER: -- or are we talking about both? 26 27 I think we're talking about both. MR MUSTON: In the 28 sense that whoever might be funding them for present 29 purposes, my question relates to the concept of, in effect, a category 4, category 5 doctor who you can see in 30 circumstances where you're unable to get into see your GP 31 32 and it would be preferable that you not present to 33 emergency. What role do you see those centres, whoever 34 might be funding them, as playing in the system? 35 36 MR SLOANE: First of all, my emergency nurse is going to 37 come out in me a little bit. Many emergency department clinicians would argue that 4s and 5s, if they have 38 presented to the emergency department, probably need to be 39 40 there. A lot of 4s and 5s get referred from general 41 practice when it's outside of the scope - the incredible scope - that general practitioners have. Some of the 4s 42 43 and 5s that present to emergency departments, while they 44 are not critically unwell when they present, may well be 45 very undifferentiated, very complex patients that 46 absolutely do need to be in emergency departments. 47

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1 So I think it is quite dangerous for us to talk 2 specifically about, you know, Australasian triage 3 categories, because that actually applies to when someone 4 arrives to emergency.

6 Speaking about it from a rural, regional and remote perspective, because that's where I probably would come at 7 8 it, being involved in some of the urgent care services' 9 placements and topography, it's very difficult at the 10 moment because of that perhaps workforce shortage or access to primary care to justify an urgent care service over -11 and when I talk about "urgent care service", I'm 12 encompassing both Commonwealth centres and/or concept 13 14 services and models of care that have been installed from the state point of view. In rural, regional and remote 15 16 areas, it's very difficult to justify that because we're 17 quite often putting it in a place that if we had a few more general practices and some very healthy primary care 18 practices, perhaps we wouldn't necessarily need it. 19 Ι 20 think it's a --

- THE COMMISSIONER: I also assume, but I don't know, the locations that are selected for these clinics - I assume they're not selected in locations where there's a risk of them cannibalising general practice business?
- 27 MR SLOANE: Yes, correct, and I think through the 28 decision-making process around that, that was a massive consideration - thus NSW Health looking at expansion of 29 30 current services that are able to do the primary care 31 services that are already in place, that are able to then 32 either expand or adjust their service proper to encompass 33 that, what we would call an urgent care 34 service application --
- THE COMMISSIONER: They are not advertised to be a substitute for primary care, are they? They are advertised, I think, to take pressure off EDs.

40 MR SLOANE: No, and I'm definitely not saying they were 41 advertised to be a substitute. What I'm saying is when 42 we've looked at locations in regional areas where that 43 might be a consideration, we would be installing something 44 in order to boost up primary care where there is no primary 45 care, so it's a moot point. With the application of, yes, 46 good general practice in primary care in some of those locations in regional areas, perhaps there would not be 47

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a need for that.

3 As we've discussed through the process, I think the 4 increase in presentations to emergency, even though we know in regional areas there's quite - per, you know, 100,000 people there's far more emergency presentations where there is a facility than there is in metro areas, where there is 8 primary care and good primary care services and general 9 practice in that location, we see a lower presentation rate 10 because they are being looked after, yes.

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> MR MUSTON: Dr Christmas?

14 DR CHRISTMAS: I think in a lot of rural areas Thank you. we are urgent care centres, so general practice already is 15 16 automatically an urgent care centre because we are the 17 hospital and we are general practice. What we see in our 18 general practice we might deal with as much as we can in 19 general practice and then up to the hospital, if need be, 20 but it's not uncommon to be giving fluids or to be giving 21 iron infusions, to be dealing with fractures, to be dealing 22 with pneumonias and working them up and making sure they're 23 safe to be managed from home and so on.

25 I think the barrier to using general practice as 26 a more urgent care service is time - so remuneration and skill set. Often in the model of care that we have for 27 28 managing illness, we're paid on a fee for service 29 time-based approach. Dealing with someone who is very unwell can actually take a lot of time and may not be very 30 31 financially viable. I have heard anecdotally of, you know, 32 situations where someone would say "Why are you looking 33 after that in general practice? Just send them to the 34 hospital", and yet it is something that we should be able to manage in general practice, even if it is a little bit 35 36 more time consuming.

I guess the other concern is urgent care centres 38 require a lot of funding, so it's an acknowledgment that to 39 40 do the job well, you require funding to do it, especially 41 to bulk bill, however, there is a push for general practice 42 to bulk bill, to service our communities and to bulk bill, 43 and where is the acknowledgment that that needs to be 44 funded, because fundamentally a lot of this urgent care 45 stuff is general practice.

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There is a discrepancy there. "Oh, yeah, provide an

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urgent care service and we'll fund to you do it", but we
won't fund general practice to do the job that it does.
I think that discrepancy has been expressed by people that
you speak to around, you know, providing general practice
care and urgent care.

7 MR SLOANE: I totally agree with Rachel. I guess that's 8 what I'm alluding to from the spots that it's happened in 9 New South Wales, from NSW Health, it has been leveraging 10 and doing that for general practices that are already in 11 existence, with co-located services or otherwise.

DR BONNING: Also, generally what we see in these urgent care clinics are GPs, so they were working somewhere and now they're working here. We haven't increased the net number of GPs available to the system.

18 One of the reasons why it can sometimes be hard to 19 manage urgent presentations in general practice is because 20 my books are - you know, I'm back to back for most of the 21 day. When I talk about how our nurse will fit things in, 22 it will be because we'll finish early and we'll have a bit of time and I can call a patient or we'll get them in while 23 24 someone's lunch break is on. This is the flexibility of the system, but also the willingness of - we would prefer 25 26 to see our own patients.

28 I love my patients, I love my job, but, as 29 Dr Christmas says, there are limits to being able to do that, otherwise we would still be there, and we often are 30 31 there, at 10 o'clock at night. But we know that often the 32 best outcomes for things that are within our scope of 33 practice are achieved by us having the nuanced 34 understanding of our patients, their lives, their capacity, even, you know, what is it going to be like to go home, you 35 36 know, if this issue is happening, if this is a pneumonia 37 that's safe to manage at home? Actually, it turns out the person who is at home with you isn't just your wife or 38 husband or whatever, it's the person you actually are 39 40 already caring for, you're the carer, so that's not a safe 41 place to go home to for someone who is of diminished 42 capacity. All of those kinds of things are, I think, 43 things we inherently understand better for our own patients 44 and, you know, personally it is what I would prefer to do 45 as a practitioner. 46

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MR MUSTON: I gather from that that none of you would

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suggest that the care that is able to be delivered in an
episodic way through an urgent care centre or clinic is any
real substitute for primary care in the sense that we've
been describing it and discussing this afternoon?

6 DR CHRISTMAS: I think there is a role, there can be 7 a role for that after-hours care. People get unwell after 8 hours and that's again a capacity in general practice 9 thing. If you have a lot of GPs, they may be able to 10 stagger their work hours so you have some GPs who work until 8pm and start at 10am or something, rather than 8 11 12 until 6 or whatever you are doing. So there is a capacity to provide - well, it would be nice to have more capacity 13 14 to provide after-hours care through general practice, if you have enough people to do that, where it's not just 15 16 adding increased workload to the GPs existing already -17 anything to keep people out of the fragmented hospital system which often over investigates and spends a lot of 18 19 money doing all of those things they do.

21 MR MUSTON: Can I ask a question about the drift away from 22 general practice that we've talked about. What could be 23 done to turn that around? In a way it sounds like some 24 success is being found in the training which is now being 25 managed and delivered through the college, but are there 26 other things that could be done to try and reverse that 27 trend?

29 MS VAN DE WATER: I might just lead off with adding on to some of the previous discussion as well. I think all of 30 31 the doctors on the panel here today have spoken about the 32 cost in a patient turning up at the hospital and the urgent 33 care centres compared to that of general practice. We 34 released data last week that the average cost to the 35 government for a patient to visit an emergency department is \$692. 36 Now, that's for a patient who is not admitted to 37 the hospital. Whereas the patient spending 20 to 40 minutes with their GP is a cost of \$83. So managing the 38 funding and the distribution of that funding and the way in 39 40 which that funding can be accessed by a general practice 41 through the team provision of service to patients is absolutely something that will support improved access, but 42 43 no doubt maximising the service that's provided by each of 44 the clinicians and team members within each of the primary 45 care settings.

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DR BONNING: So given the question now is about what does

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our future look like, you can project ahead. I'm trying to 1 2 remember where it is, where the data is. I think the 3 Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Institute of Health 4 and Welfare project that forward for New South Wales and they say our number of general practitioners won't start 5 6 really to rise in total on projections until about 2034, 7 something like that. We had a number of people stay in the workforce because of the pandemic, they felt - or they 8 9 returned on the sub-register, so we actually had an influx 10 and that number has dropped away. To replace that but actually to grow our workforce is taking some time. 11 That's important from a population who we see, over time, needs, 12 because they are ageing, because it is growing, more 13 14 general practice services. So that is kind of - that's the call to arms, why do we need it. 15 16

17 MR MUSTON: How do we do it is the question.

DR BONNING: What you achieve in all of this, though, is the last time, and Georgina, please correct me if I'm wrong, I seem to remember that the commitment to go from 800 or 900 GP training places to 1,300 to 1,400 was by Minister Roxon back in 2008 or 2009, so it's been quite a while.

26 It used to be that about 40 per cent of the graduates 27 out of medical school went into general practice. Now we 28 know that number, depending on which year you pick, for 29 Australian medical graduates, is somewhere between 12 and So your target, given that we are now in a 30 15 per cent. 31 position where the college is delivering a program that is 32 being fully subscribed, is to grow the subscription limit, 33 and I think that's a clear recommendation.

The second is that every - you know, the college of 35 GPs, the College of Rural and Remote Medicine. the rural 36 doctors agencies, lots of others, we've all been saying, 37 you know, "How great is general practice", we're talking 38 about it here, Mr Sloane's been complimentary about it. 39 It 40 would be lovely to see that the rest of the public knows 41 that, because otherwise it does become, "Why am I the clerical staff" you know, the number of times I've been 42 asked in my career about, "Oh, Did you choose to be 43 44 specialise in anything?" I'm like, "Yeah, I'm really good 45 at this job, thanks very much" is guite challenging. It's 46 changing the public's mentality about what their GP is 47 there for.

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2 Overall it is creating a future which requires public 3 education around the role of general practice, especially 4 if we want to keep healthcare costs under control. It 5 would be encouraging people to have a regular, consistent relationship with their GPs and funding us into the system, 6 7 both by the Commonwealth and the state, to be able to do 8 those things that cross over between the two. So regular 9 general practice that is funded through Medicare but also 10 shared programs with hospital systems, so bridging that divide and that gap so that our patients who are complex -11 you know, we see programs and models of - they are called, 12 13 GPwSIs, GPs with special interests, who work across 14 hospital systems - it's more prominent in Queensland than here, but we see it here as well. One of the great things 15 16 about that, I always say, is the ability of the GP to know 17 when to discharge the patient from the outpatient service. or even the inpatient service, is often very good because 18 19 they know what's happening in the community. It's about 20 using those resources better.

22 The overall funding for unreferred medical services, 23 which is general practice, is about 6.5 per cent of the 24 total healthcare spend. What's his name again? He's from 25 Ochre Health. Hamish Meldrum did a survey of the public. 26 The public thinks that general practice services are funded 27 to somewhere between 20 and 40 per cent of the total health 28 So the public expects a lot of us, they think care spend. 29 there's a lot of money that goes there. There isn't that So bringing more 30 much, or as much as they anticipate. 31 people in the front door, giving people options, as was 32 talked about, with regards to keeping them in practice, so 33 they are interested in something, ways in which we take 34 that interest and make them excellent and as part of the team, whether it's, you know, they want to be really good 35 36 at cardiology, they deliver great women's health services in the community, you know, like me, I do lots of doctors' 37 health, so health care for other doctors - all of those 38 kinds of things we really double down into that. 39

I think lastly, we work with the federal government on how to make general practice more viable, but also more viable to do the things we've just talked about, to provide care, more care out of hours, to be more able to fit in, manage, support those people who need our care when they need it, to make sure that there are systems in place rather than just great people, so systems like we would

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have in the hospital system to support a community - all of
those things are what are going to mean that, over the long
run, you actually end up spending far less because your
population is healthy.

6 MR MUSTON: Dr Hoffman, from the college's perspective, 7 are there things that you think we could be doing to turn 8 the tide in terms of the drift away from general practice?

10 DR HOFFMAN: Absolutely. There are probably three populations that I want to speak to. The first one is the 11 12 retiring GP or the GP that plans to retire in the next five The second is the cohort of GPs who have obtained 13 vears. 14 their medical degree in another country and the third is 15 the cohort of Australian-trained doctors choosing to be 16 GPs.

18 Apologies, my PhD is on burnout in general practice, 19 so I will try to concise this down to a few minutes rather 20 than 40,000 words. Retiring GPs, we actually asked this in 21 our survey most recently a month ago - and there is a big 22 cohort of GPs who did come back during COVID that now plan 23 to retire in the next five years. When we asked them, 24 "What will keep you in the workforce? What will keep you working for longer?" It's red tape and it's costs. 25 So 26 being able to pay or incentivise pay more and reduce the red tape, reduce the doctors sitting at their desks until 27 28 10pm at night, will absolutely increase the workforce.

The second one is our overseas trained doctors, our 30 31 doctors who are specialist GPs in other countries. As of 32 next Monday, will have an expedited pathway, if you trained 33 in the UK, in Ireland or New Zealand, to come to Australia 34 and work here. They will still have a moratorium, they will still be required to work in Modified Monash areas 2 35 36 through 7, but there will be a significantly faster way for 37 them to come to Australia and work here.

We need to make sure that not only when they come here, they are embraced, they understand the GPs and the Australian hospital system, that they've got good reliable networks and that they are safe. It's not yet clear from the Ahpra and from the AMC, exactly how that's going to work. I'm happy to stop at any point.

46 THE COMMISSIONER: Can I ask you a question so
47 I understand just in relation to the point you were making

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1 about retiring GPs and what are their frustrations. 0ne 2 you said was red tape. I'm not a clinician. That could 3 mean anything. Can you tell me what you mean by red tape? 4 5 DR HOFFMAN: What I mean by red tape is paperwork. So it really comes down - it's the patients asking for their 6 7 Centrelink certificate to be updated because it's been 8 three months since the last one was done or their WorkCover 9 certificate to be done because it's been 28 days since 10 their last one, and nothing has changed in that 28 days but that's the time frame that's required for me to sign a new 11 piece of paper. The GP can't make the decision to extend 12 that out and say "They've broken their leg, it's going to 13 14 be six weeks" or "it's going to be three months." This piece of paperwork should be able to be modified to be 15 16 three months. It's that, no, I've got to do this every 17 28 days, that we're not actually given permission to be flexible with that. 18 19 20 If there was a little bit more flexibility around some 21 of that, it would be great. There's NDIS paperwork that we 22 don't have funding as GPs to be able to complete. So we either charge the patient or we do it for free. The red 23 24 tape is the paperwork. 25 26 THE COMMISSIONER: Got it, thanks. Now, I interrupted 27 you. You were still talking maybe about overseas trained 28 doctors but heading to locals. 29 No, I was moving on to junior doctors. I was 30 DR HOFFMAN: 31 moving on to probably my favourite topic, which is junior 32 doctors and medical students. We rightfully say there used to be about 40 per cent of medical students, when they left 33 34 medical school, that went, "Yes, let's be a GP", and that's dropped right back to 11 per cent. So what we would really 35 36 like to see are targets at a university level to pick that back up, and the target needs to be at about 50 per cent, 37 that 50 per cent of medical students, when they leave, go 38 39 "Yes, general practice is for me." 40 41 Then there is this dive, when they're junior doctors and they come in and they're interns and they're residents 42 43 and they never experience general practice again except 44 when they're sick or when they're in crisis. This is the 45 cohort that most commonly decide not to be a GP. So 46 re-engaging them back in general practice, and that could be through what we previously had done about a decade ago, 47

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1 the PGPPP, so that's where they do community rotations 2 through general practice for one of their standard terms, 3 one of their 10- to 12-week terms, that might be through 4 a single employer model. There are a number of 5 ways that --6 7 THE COMMISSIONER: I have asked someone previously what 8 that acronym stood for. I'm going to ask you again. What 9 did it stand for? 10 DR HOFFMAN: It's the postgraduate primary --11 12 13 DR BONNING: Prevocational general practice placements 14 program. 15 16 DR HOFFMAN: Thank you. 17 18 The person that I asked to describe the THE COMMISSIONER: 19 acronym also said it was a terrific scheme, but no-one 20 could tell me why it was abandoned, other than it coincided 21 with a particular election. 22 23 DR HOFFMAN: I've spoken to HETI about this only 24 yesterday, and they've actually said it was too successful, which I'm not sure if that's entirely true. 25 26 27 THE COMMISSIONER: Now we're in Utopia. 28 29 DR HOFFMAN: They needed the workforce in the hospital. 30 31 DR BONNING: It's expensive. It was always expensive for 32 Just to comment, I think, on that, even prior hospitals. to that, so before general practice became as formalised as 33 34 it is now, many of the senior consultants you were seeing in hospital used to moonlight in general practice, so this 35 is before 1996. They would be doing their registrar 36 training but then they would come and work for someone on 37 the weekends. 38 39 40 The reason I say - none of them went into general 41 practice, but they had an appreciation of what we did and what was difficult about it, and many of them will say, 42 43 "I love what I do because I do the same thing. It's a nice 44 I hate what you do. I couldn't do what you niche bubble. 45 do" - because it's a fracture, followed by a complex mental 46 health, followed by a heart failure, followed by a child, followed by someone with Alzheimer's. That's a pretty 47

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1 common day. That appreciation - so coming back to who are 2 we talking to when we think about the future, we're talking 3 to the public about understanding what a GP does and how 4 great it can be. The funding models also drive then what 5 kind of GPs we produce, so if the focus is on getting through lots of patients, then the easiest pathway is to 6 7 write a referral, to say, "Please do this", and send them 8 somewhere else so that someone else does the work. 9 10 But also it is about our rest of our colleagues, and that's why PGPPP and other programs have been great, 11 because they reintroduced a whole generation of 12 13 hospital-based specialists to the idea of, "Oh, wow, the 14 patients I see in the hospital have often been kept incredibly well for a very long time", and it promotes 15 16 a much more respectful discourse within our professions, 17 and that's important, too. 18 MR MUSTON: 19 Dr Christmas, you wanted to add something? 20 21 DR CHRISTMAS: Yes, thank you. One of the things we know 22 about general practice, and especially in rural areas, is that if you have exposure during the junior doctor years, 23 24 you are more likely to choose that as a specialty, whether that be in the country or the city, especially, though, in 25 26 the country, because general practice in the country is 27 different to in the city because we do that public/private 28 thing where we're in the hospitals as well, and often 29 general practice suffers from that it's not as lucrative financially, it's not a sexy profession, you don't go to 30 someone and say, "Hi, I'm a GP, pay me some kudos". 31 32 33 There's this whole idea, which is perpetuated through 34 medical school and through the hospital system, that general practice really is the pour cousin, which we all 35 36 know in primary care is not the case; it is actually 37 incredibly important. 38 We know that if junior doctors are exposed to general 39 40 practice, we get them in that gap that you were talking 41 about - your name just suddenly has gone out of my head, I'm so sorry - talking about getting people, at that time 42 in junior doctor years, before they get snaffled by the 43 44 consultant in cardiology or in surgery, that they also have 45 a great time with mentors in general practice. 46 47 The trick about this is in rural hospitals, we've got

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called what's called the "John Flynn" rural general
practice - anyway, it's got another acronym - where there
is funding for junior doctors to go into places like where
I work, where they work part of the time in the hospital
under supervision and part of the time in general practice,
so they really get an idea of what this whole idea of rural
general practice is all about.

9 The trouble with this is it is becoming a thing that 10 they will do if they can afford to part with their interns 11 or residents from the base hospital. So what we see is 12 these positions are not being prioritised and they're not 13 being filled because they want them back in the base 14 hospital to fill their night shift or to fill their 15 emergency or their whatever, medical rotation.

17 If there are KPIs around that, if there's, "Actually we need to fill these positions, these are a priority", 18 19 because we realise that (a) it's a good support for someone 20 like me doing the job, because I am my own resident, my own 21 intern, my own registrar, consultant, I can actually really 22 do with that help and that would help ease the load on me so I can do my job better, but it gives junior doctors from 23 24 metro and rural areas excellent experience and exposure so they actually understand the breadth of general practice. 25 26 So even if they don't choose - as Dr Bonning was saying, 27 even if they don't choose general practice as a specialty, 28 they go into their specialties understanding more about it 29 and saving, "Oh, yeah, I've seen this kind of patient. This is what I'm sending them home to and this is how 30 I need to communicate with the GP." Because if one more 31 32 junior doctor says, "And, GP, kindly chase results" - they 33 don't understand that, from a general practice point of 34 view, that doesn't --

THE COMMISSIONER: Had you finished what you wanted to say, Dr Hoffman, when I interrupted you about the acronym?

I think what you're hearing from the 39 DR HOFFMAN: No. 40 three doctors on the panel is that general practice is the 41 best career that is available of any of the medical 42 options, and if the junior doctors experience a quality 43 general practice, then we would have more numbers of 44 doctors wanting to be GPs. RACGP has the capacity to train 45 these junior doctors who want to be GPs, and again it's not 46 overnight, but it isn't a 15- till 2032-year solution but it might be a three- to five-year solution, and that 47

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absolutely will change health care in rural, regional and
 outer metro New South Wales.

MR MUSTON: Mr Sloane, do you have any insights into the state's position or views on this, what might have been an excessive successful scheme?

8 MR SLOANE: Look, I think again, what became very obvious 9 early on in my original post as coordinator general, and 10 then it still continues, is that models like the 11 Murrumbidgee model - you know, we've all heard a lot about 12 that and now we've expanded that across the state around 13 the rural generalist single employer model.

What we heard through the previous rural and remote 15 16 access to health care and hospital inquiry, from a lot of doctors who were in the early stages of training, was when 17 they do go to specialise and are thinking about going into 18 19 general practice, one of the big barriers for them, at that 20 point in time, was the loss of their entitlements. When 21 they leave the public New South Wales health system, they 22 loose their maternity leave option and their annual leave, any other entitlements that they have accrued during that 23 24 time, and it was a pretty big decision.

It became very obvious to us quickly, off the back of the successes of the Murrumbidgee model, that if we could somehow play our part from a NSW Health point of view in providing a single employer model that works very closely with the colleges with regards to the training and be able to do so that, you know, as I said earlier in the day, very much works to preserve private practice.

34 For me, I'm very biased, I want private primary health care to stay in regions, because that's the reliance. 35 36 Doctors like Rachel work tirelessly out there and we needed to do anything that we possibly could to play in that space 37 and play our part with regards to it. So we did seek 38 exemption from the Commonwealth in order to do so, in order 39 40 to make that both a hospital and private practice viable 41 model.

43 Early days, we only started last year, but we've 44 already increased the single employer model places across 45 the state from five in Murrumbidgee. I think we're 46 starting 29 at the start of next year and I might make it 47 very clear that this is advanced skill training positions

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1 that are doing registrar training.

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We know economically, not that I want to harp on about that a lot, that that's far more cost effective than paying some exorbitant prices for temporary medical officers, even though they're a very valuable asset, for things like leave or otherwise. So we know employing a registrar into a salaried position, we still get an incredibly equipped doctor and then we afford them the option to be able to train and be exposed to primary care and private practice.

12 It's not smooth sailing, like we've had to work through a couple of the rough edges of the model with 13 14 regards to the cost to the district. The remuneration is not necessarily there from the Commonwealth. 15 We have to 16 create some pretty significant engagement and trust and 17 assurance with the private practices that we're working with, and so we've had to appoint a small team in order to 18 19 do that and travel around and actually have those 20 discussions with, whether it be the AMA, RACGP or ACRRM, 21 HETI, and most importantly all the private practice 22 providers, who are essentially donating their training skills and ability in order to get this model off the 23 24 around.

26 We've had amazing feedback from all of the candidates 27 There has been a bit of interesting sort involved so far. 28 of misinformation about how successful the Murrumbidgee 29 model has been, but of the five candidates they've had through their program, three of them have been fellowed and 30 31 been retained in the district or in regional areas. 32 A lovely couple has sort of springboarded off that to stay 33 and be retained in Deniliquin and provide a very well-loved 34 service as general practitioners in that town.

So again it's not going to be one of those things - it will piggyback off the stuff that Dr Hoffman and her team are doing from the college point of view, and ACRRM as well, but it's one of those things where, from a state health point of view, we've had to recognise our responsibility and play right up to that line of where the Commonwealth responsibility starts and stops.

The sort of contribution has been not fiscal from
the Commonwealth whatsoever; it's been in the form of
19(2) exemptions, again, so it is another rerouted way of,
I guess, applying funding through a different mechanism or

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1 otherwise. With all intents and purposes, we hope it 2 continues to be successful and grow as we go forward, with 3 a view that we will retain doctors in the regions with that 4 exposure, and we will hopefully ease the burden on and work 5 closely with primary practice in regional areas as well. 6 7 MR MUSTON: What are the tools that you've got available 8 when you're dealing, in a place-based way, with the thin, 9 failing or failed GP market? You referred to some success

What worked there, just as a starter?

11 MR SLOANE: 12 This is one of those tricky things because it 13 is from a state health point of view, ear to the ground. 14 It's close relationships between local health districts and primary health networks. It's use of other non-government 15 16 organisations like the Rural Doctors Network to try and 17 understand - I am of the understanding that Department of Health and Ageing have some form of tool, I believe it's 18 19 very manual, to track and have an overview of thin and 20 failing markets, but we do rely on negotiation between our 21 very well-organised local health districts, their local 22 communities and the GPs that are working in those towns.

24 Eden is a very good example of where again, the doctor, a very small, very hard to keep viable business 25 26 because of low volumes or otherwise, and I think the -27 again, I might be misquoting here but the GP there was 28 finding it very hard to go on leave, had been working 29 continuously for guite some time. If he was to hire a locum in order to go on leave, he would have been - I'm 30 31 not talking about the locum pricing but that whole concept 32 itself would have been very hard for him to do that and 33 keep the business viable.

So it was escalated through me, just through good 35 relationships and knowledge, that that might be 36 a consideration and that would put that small community in 37 a bit of a spot, and so we worked very closely with RDN, 38 and then up through the Commonwealth, to go, "Right what's 39 40 happening from a thin markets' point of view to help this person?" And RDN were able to successfully help him get 41 42 a cost-effective option in order to take that leave.

Again that rolls into some of that succession planning that Dr Bonning talked about, and Dr Hoffman, with regards to how can we put some other systems around that and stop it from happening. For that instance, it's very difficult

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in Braidwood.

for NSW Health to go, "Right, we're going to help you out 1 2 by moving a staff member", because there is absolutely no 3 remuneration for us to do that. But we are very cognisant 4 of the impact that not having that GP, or that GP service 5 for that community, will then have flow-on effects to not only the community proper, which is the most important 6 7 thing, but where do we then accept them into state health 8 care.

10 MR MUSTON: I might ask any of you to comment on this, but in the context of a market which we might describe as 11 12 a failed market, so not jeopardising a thin or existing GP market in a particular centre and no realistic prospect of 13 14 attracting a GP or GPs into a particular area to provide primary care to that community, is a salaried model 15 16 something which is of interest or you think would be of 17 interest to the state and, Dr Hoffman, from your perspective, something which you think would be of value to 18 19 the college from a training perspective but also as an 20 attractor to someone who might prefer to work in that type 21 of commercial environment?

23 DR HOFFMAN: Again I think one town is one town is one 24 What is attractive in one town would be very town. 25 different to another town. In Sydney we have Kurnell, on 26 the outskirts of Sydney, and it's a failed market. It 27 hasn't had a GP for two years and it's in Sydney. So 28 putting a salaried doctor there probably won't put a GP 29 there. There's complex reasons as to why they can't attract and find a GP to stay there. 30

I might pass to Georgina, because we've had enormous successes in Tasmania from the single employer model and filling the Tasmanian market from offering similar.

36 MS VAN DE WATER: Our experience is there that, as you say with each town, similarly for each doctor, and the single 37 employer models across Australia have had varied interest 38 and different levels of success. I think absolutely 39 I agree with what was said about the Murrumbidgee model, 40 and the retention of that is really going to be the proof 41 in the pudding, I think, of the success of that model and 42 43 the team down there have done a tremendous job. 44

From our perspective, we have implemented opportunities for remote supervision for registrars, so where there isn't a GP in a town, understanding from our

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local teams on the ground, working with the local LHDs,
working with the PHNs and others to identify those areas
where there is a service gap and look at how we can
leverage safe and quality supervision through a remote
supervision arrangement that we've implemented in the last
12 months.

8 For instance, towns like Broken Hill have been able to 9 achieve that, as well as some other towns across New South 10 Wales - sorry, Bourke, not Broken Hill, where we've been 11 able to achieve registrars delivering service through 12 flexible funds that have been applied specifically for 13 relocation costs and support of return visits, and then 14 additionally with remote supervision.

16 I think absolutely we need to ensure that we are 17 creating opportunities for exposure for doctors within those junior medical officer years, the prevocational 18 19 years, to experience quality general practice. At the same 20 time we need to make sure that we're setting expectations around our Australian universities to create rotations and 21 22 opportunities for med student placements in general practice in our rural and remote communities. 23

25 The other aspect that I think is really important as 26 we move forward is making sure that our international medical graduates who take up placements in practices in 27 28 rural and remote communities are well supported to apply 29 their skills but also adapt their skills to the Australian Part of that is helping the community to 30 context. understand the role that these doctors have and the ability 31 32 that those doctors bring through their own experience as 33 well.

It's a wrap-around comprehensive approach to making sure that we're feeding in to the service capacity and making sure that between the local health district, the training programs in the region, as well as our other agencies, that we're truly working collectively to make sure we're supporting those doctors that are in situ to be able to stay there.

43 MR SLOANE: Yes, I agree with all of what has been said. 44 I think the other thing we're doing from a NSW Health 45 perspective is we have, over the last 12 months, been in 46 consultation with the Department of Health and Ageing 47 around specific funding to trial that.

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1 2 I one hundred per cent agree with Dr Hoffman's 3 comments. Planning for any sort of model needs to be place 4 based and contextualised. You can take any model on scale 5 but the success relies on the contextualisation to that. 6 7 We're currently looking, and have put out an EOI 8 recently, for access to a pool of funding - and I outline 9 this in my witness statement - that lies outside of the current regulatory levers and funding mechanisms from the 10 It's a small amount of funding, but to be 11 Commonwealth. applied to test pilot sites - we often hear about pilots. 12 but if we don't try stuff, test it and evaluate it, we 13 14 can't really check - across a couple of different areas. 15 16 We're looking at Canowindra, first and foremost, in 17 western New South Wales. We'll be looking at a salaried model there, very similar to HealthOne at Bowraville. 18 I will just point out there's other economic benefit to 19 20 Bowraville around cultural safety for the community there 21 that's probably very invisible, from the Aboriginal people 22 that are accessing health care there and the work they have 23 done. 24 25 We're looking at a cross-jurisdictional cross-PHN 26 trial with the Victorian town of Swan Hill and between the Murrumbidgee PHN and the Murray PHN around almost a 27 28 4Ts-esque style model of salaried medical officer or 29 multidisciplinary team led model down there to cover off four or five different communities that lie along the 30 31 inter-jurisdictional border there as well. 32 33 The other one is consideration for Balranald. We 34 haven't worked through all the details in that at the moment, but we can see that again that low volume, 35 36 non-viable MBS billing funding which could hardly prop up 37 a viable small practice there and that's why it has been very tricky for them to get a medical practitioner in that 38 town and I know it's very important to that town. 39 We're 40 looking at how we could put perhaps a salaried model there. 41 It might not necessarily be medical led, but some form of salaried model from a primary care perspective and in 42 collaboration with Far West Local Health District. 43 44 45 MR MUSTON: I note the time, Commissioner. I think we've 46 occupied half an hour longer of these witnesses' time than I could ask a lot more questions but 47 I was going to.

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1 I probably don't need to. 2 3 Fair enough. I don't know whether it THE COMMISSIONER: 4 is relevant or not but maybe it is just curiosity, why 5 can't Kurnell - what are the complex reasons or some of them for not being able to attract a GP? 6 7 8 DR HOFFMAN: Good question. It's a very high load of 9 mental health and complex mental health, with an 10 expectation to be bulk billed and with the incentive rates for an MM1 --11 12 13 THE COMMISSIONER: You can't run a successful business 14 there under the MBS rates as they stand. 15 16 DR HOFFMAN: No. 17 18 As you get closer to any of the boundaries of DR BONNING: 19 other DPAs - so priority allocations, so where we can place 20 internationally trained doctors - so when you're on the 21 close side of the line, very hard to place there. When you 22 are on the close side of MMM1 going into MMM2, also very 23 difficult to place there. 24 25 THE COMMISSIONER: So Kurnell isn't necessarily an isolated example of that problem where there's 26 socioeconomic disadvantage, so the expectation from the 27 28 patients is, "Well, I can't pay you, it has to be bulk 29 billed", but the needs are so complex and the time taken for the consult makes it economically unviable for the GP's 30 31 business. 32 33 DR BONNING: Areas around Newcastle have some really 34 similar experiences. Hunter New England has lots of challenges for those exact same reasons, because it's - if 35 36 it is a fee for service model, the amount of time you need 37 to spend, it does become unviable. 38 Yes, because mental health is not THE COMMISSIONER: 39 40 a six-minute consult. 41 42 DR BONNING: No. 43 44 THE COMMISSIONER: Mr Cheney, do you have any - or 45 Mr Chiu, I'm not sure which one to ask at the moment. 46 47 MR CHIU: We have no questions.

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2	THE COMMISSIONER: Great, thank you.
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4	To all five of you, thank you very much for your time.
5	We are very grateful. I apologise for going slightly
6	longer, but it was worthwhile from our perspective. So
7	thank you again. You are excused.
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9	<the td="" withdrew<="" witnesses=""></the>
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11	THE COMMISSIONER: We will adjourn until 10 o'clock
12	tomorrow.
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14	AT 4.36PM THE SPECIAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY WAS ADJOURNED
15	TO THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2024 AT 10AM
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