Special Commission of Inquiry

into Healthcare Funding

Before: The Commissioner, Mr Richard Beasley SC

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

Friday, 15 November 2024 at 10.00am

(Day 060)

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 Hilbert Chiu SC with Ms Joanna Davidson for NSW Health

1 THE COMMISSIONER: Good morning. 2 3 DR WATERHOUSE: Good morning, Commissioner. 4 5 Today we'll be hearing from the third clinician panel and this panel will consider the issue of patients who no 6 7 longer need acute hospital care but cannot be discharged 8 because of barriers in obtaining the aged care or 9 disability supports that they need. 10 11 The Inquiry has been told that this is a common 12 scenario with impacts on the patients themselves, the staff involved in caring for them and bed flows throughout the 13 system, with the result that other patients or potential 14 patients can also be affected. 15 16 17 Many of the obstacles are seen as beyond control of 18 the local health districts and reflect challenges with 19 Commonwealth Government funded aged care facilities and the 20 National Disability Insurance Scheme. 21 22 That said, there are innovative approaches being taken 23 to manage local situations to the extent possible. 24 We have six clinicians participating in this panel 25 In the room with us, there is Amy Okulicz, who is 26 today. 27 the nurse unit manager, rehabilitation and geriatric 28 rehabilitation unit at Wyong Hospital, Central Coast; 29 Melissa Pickering, the acting director of nursing and midwifery at Central Coast Local Health District; Brendan 30 31 Shortis, acting nurse manager, community health, at Nepean 32 Blue Mountains, Local Health District. 33 34 Giving evidence online, via AVL, all from the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, we have 35 36 Professor Jan Potter, who is a staff specialist geriatrician and co-director of aged care and 37 rehabilitation division for the district; Rachael Hawkins, 38 the aged care nurse unit manager at Wollongong Hospital; 39 40 and Ben Wakeling, director of clinical strategy and 41 outcomes at the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District. 42 43 Commissioner, I'm told that Rachael Hawkins and 44 Professor Potter will be giving evidence under the oath and 45 the remaining four witnesses will take an affirmation. 46 47

1 <JAN POTTER, sworn:

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[10.03am]

- 3 <RACHAEL HAWKINS sworn:</pre>
- 5 <AMY OKULICZ, affirmed:
- 7 **<MELISSA PICKERING**, affirmed:
- 9 **SRENDAN JOHN SHORTIS**, affirmed:
- 11 **<BENJAMIN WAKELING**, affirmed:
- 13 <EXAMINATION BY MS WATERHOUSE:
- DR WATERHOUSE: As there are three witnesses in the court and three online, I'm going to divide this into five broad topics so that you don't need to try to cover everything you might like to say in the first couple of answers to questions that might be asked.
- The topics that we'll be covering today are: the causes of the delays in discharging aged care and NDIS patients; the effects on bed flow; the consequences and risks for patients; the impacts on staff; and the actions taken and other possible solutions to these sorts of issues.
  - To start with, though, I'd like to get a sense of the magnitude of the problem in your respective local health districts. Could I go to you first, Ms Pickering.
  - I beg your pardon, I haven't actually got you to state your full names for the record.
- Ms Okulicz, could you state your full name for the record.
- 38 MS OKULICZ: Amy Okulicz.
- 40 DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Pickering.
- 42 MS PICKERING: Melissa Pickering
- 44 DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Shortis.
- 46 MS PICKERING: Brendan John Shortis,
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1 DR WATERHOUSE: Professor Potter, could you state your 2 full name for the record. 3 4 MS POTTER: Jan Potter. 5 MS WATERHOUSE: Ms Hawkins. 6 7 8 MS HAWKINS: Rachael Hawkins. 9 10 DR WATERHOUSE: And Mr Wakeling. 11 12 MR WAKELING: Benjamin Wakeling. 13 THE COMMISSIONER: I should just say that if Dr Waterhouse 14 15 addresses a particular question to any of you, the rest of 16 you should feel free to indicate, by any reasonable means, 17 that you would like to supplement the answer or provide 18 anything further. So please don't hesitate to jump in as 19 appropriate. 20 21 DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Pickering, if I can go to you, can you 22 tell me an estimate of how many geriatric and NDIS patients you have in Central Coast Local Health District facilities 23 that are waiting there, not requiring acute care but just 24 25 waiting for other reasons at the moment. 26 MS PICKERING: 27 If I can start with the older population 28 that are sitting across Gosford --29 MS WATERHOUSE: I might just get you to move the 30 31 microphone a little closer to you. 32 33 THE COMMISSIONER: All of you will need to keep your 34 voices up, mainly for my benefit but also for others. 35 36 MS PICKERING: In response to the older people Thank you. that are sitting within our hospitals on the Central Coast, 37 across Gosford and Wyong, I guess, on average, if I was to 38 look at some of the data, September and October this year, 39 40 we had between 60 and 70 older people awaiting residential 41 aged care facility placement. And that's from the time of assessment to then time of placement, on average, the older 42 43 people are in hospital for about two weeks for many 44 Some of those reasons include family choosing reasons. 45 a facility for their loved one, and often they will decline 46 residential aged care facilities until they reach a facility that they feel is comfortable. 47

1 2 DR WATERHOUSE: We might come back to that as part of the 3 causes that we're talking about in a moment. 4 5 MS PICKERING: Sure. 6 7 DR WATERHOUSE: So that's the aged care numbers. And what 8 about the NDIS? 9 10 MS PICKERING: Unfortunately I probably don't have that number to be able to share today across the district. 11 Yes. 12 13 DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Shortis, do you have a sense from 14 Nepean Blue Mountains of the numbers that you are looking 15 at that are in hospital without needing acute care? 16 17 MR SHORTIS: I work in the community section so I'm only 18 aware of when they come to the community. 19 20 DR WATERHOUSE: Is it something you can speak to 21 anecdotally in terms of how frequently this is happening? 22 Reports that I have is that it is 23 MR SHORTIS: It's a significant hold-up, but I don't have the numbers. 24 25 not in my role. 26 DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Wakeling, are you able to speak for the 27 28 Illawarra in relation to these numbers? 29 Yes, thank you, Dr Waterhouse. 30 MR WAKELING: As of 11 November, which was Monday, there were 38 NDIS patients 31 32 at Illawarra Shoalhaven that were suitable for discharge 33 but awaiting NDIS acceptance and support, and that's 34 40 per cent of our mental health bed base and 60 per cent 35 of our sub-acute bed base. The average length of stay, once suitable for discharge, was 43 days, and at that point 36 37 in time, the amount of people awaiting NDIS and that length of stay totalled 1,700 bed days. 38 39 40 As of Monday 11 November, patients awaiting 41 a residential aged care facility at Illawarra Shoalhaven 15 per cent was in our ED accessible bed base and 42 was 122. 43 the rest, 85 per cent, was in our sub-acute bed base. The 44 average length of stay, once suitable for discharge, was 45 19 days, and the volume and the length of stay totalled 46 3,500 bed days in Illawarra Shoalhaven. Thank you. 47

1 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you.

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Professor Potter, maybe if I could start with you, can you outline what you see as the key causes of the delays in being able to discharge aged care patients in particular, given your background?

8 PROFESSOR POTTER: Okay. So in the last three years, 9 since the Royal Commission and COVID, we have lost 600 aged 10 care facility beds, permanently lost them from our 11 district, with no plans within the aged care sector to 12 rebuild these beds.

14 There's lots of reasons for that, which I can go into 15 if you want me to. So we've lost 600 beds, and that has 16 resulted in us having the numbers that Ben has already 17 spoken to waiting for placement.

19 Although he has given you the length of stay from 20 acceptance to placement to discharge, I would have to add 21 to that that specific groups of patients, in particular the 22 dementia patients with behavioural disturbance, can wait up 23 to a year for a bed, and there are no dementia-specific bed 24 vacancies at all in ISLHD aged care, and none of the 25 providers are proposing to build new dementia-specific So that's that particular issue for our patients 26 beds. 27 within hospital, waiting placements.

DR WATERHOUSE: When you say you've lost those beds, what exactly do you mean by "lost"? Is it that the facilities have closed or they can't --

- 33 PROFESSOR POTTER: The providers have closed --
- 35 DR WATERHOUSE: Sorry?

PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, the providers have closed the beds
permanently - for a variety of reasons to do with the Royal
Commission, a perception that these beds are not good
quality for patients, and the local council provisions on
what sorts of buildings can be built - a whole load of
different factors like that.

Also, during COVID, Illawarra Shoalhaven had a high
dependency on overseas nursing for aged care facilities
and, of course, there was a long period of time where we
couldn't have any overseas nurses coming in, so difficulty

1 staffing, difficulty making it work in terms of funding and 2 a reluctance and a poor perception of what going into 3 residential aged care means. 4 5 The majority of those 600 beds that have closed, providers are considering opening things like retirement 6 7 villages for over 55s, not looking to provide the sort of 8 patient groups that we've got now waiting for placement. 9 10 DR WATERHOUSE: Do you find that patients --11 THE COMMISSIONER: 12 Sorry, I don't know whether Mr Wakeling has his hand up, perhaps, to respond to that? 13 14 DR WATERHOUSE: Yes, Mr Wakeling? 15 16 17 MR WAKELING: It is, thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, 18 Dr Waterhouse. Just to support Professor Potter in regards to the numbers on patients with severe behaviours or 19 20 aggression, at the moment at Wollongong Hospital, the 21 longest delay is 192 days, supporting Professor Potter's 22 "almost a year". The average at Wollongong is 19 days. In our dementia-specific hospital where these patients are 23 awaiting residential aged care, Coledale hospital west wing 24 ward, which has 16 beds, their longest delay currently is 25 155 days, and the average wait there is 43 days, a 26 significant challenge for ISLHD. I just thought I would 27 28 add that to support Professor Potter. Thank you. 29 DR WATERHOUSE: 30 Thank you. 31 32 Professor Potter do you find that there are delays in 33 actually having the patients assessed by ACAT teams or is it really that that process is quite streamlined and it's 34 going from that point when they have been found suitable 35 for placement? 36 37 PROFESSOR POTTER: 38 Look, we've done a lot of work looking Our ACAT teams are adhering to the KPIs for 39 at this. 40 hospitalised patients, which is within 40 hours of 41 referral. That's not to say there's not improvements that could be made in that. There's often delays to making the 42 43 referral for aged care, and that comes down to the 44 underlying cause of the numbers. So within Illawarra 45 Shoalhaven, our population, we have a lot of people 46 retiring from cities to this area. Our proportion of frail elderly is highest in New South Wales, in particular 47

1 Shoalhaven. We have approximately 5.7 residents who are 2 aged 80 or over, compared to 4.8 in New South Wales in 3 general, and that is really further exaggerated in 4 Shoalhaven. 5 So we've got this increasing need, we've got this 6 7 increasing dementia population, and at the same time, we're 8 losing and have lost the beds in the community funded by 9 the Commonwealth that we require to host those patients. 10 11 I think, going back to the delays to referring to 12 ACAT, that's because in Wollongong Hospital, for example, which is our main tertiary hospital where we do most of our 13 14 admissions, we have a bed base of 21 patients for acute 15 geriatric medicine. We, at the moment, have a minimum of 16 60 patients in Wollongong Hospital at any one time. So 17 those other patients are scattered throughout surgical 18 wards, acute medical wards, where nursing staff and - also 19 we have gone from having 20 consultations to geriatric 20 medicine from other specialty teams, in the last two years, 21 to 60 a week, you know. 22 23 So basically, a lot of these patients are under teams 24 who do not have the expertise to manage them, do not have the interest in that group either, and so that leads to 25 26 further delays in appropriate decisions being made. 27 28 I'm going to come back to some of that if DR WATERHOUSE: 29 I may. Can I just go, while we're still in the Illawarra, to Ms Hawkins. 30 31 32 So do you find that patients - it's mainly in your 33 wards that you look after, it's mainly about placements, 34 obviously, but are there also patients waiting to be 35 transferred out for other types of care, such as 36 rehabilitation? 37 MS HAWKINS: 38 Correct. So at the moment, between C7 east, 39 which is an aged care ward currently, a temporary aged care 40 ward, we currently have 15 patients admitted that are under 41 the care of a geriatrician; B3 east, there are 24, which is 42 our acute geriatric ward. So between the two wards, there 43 are currently 39 patients admitted under the care of 44 a geriatrician and there's nine --45 46 DR WATERHOUSE: Just before you go on, can I clarify? 47

1 MS HAWKINS: Yes. 2 3 DR WATERHOUSE: When you say "under the care of 4 a geriatrician", does that mean they need acute care or 5 they just happen to be admitted under that person --6 7 MS HAWKINS: They're admitted --8 -- but waiting transfer? 9 DR WATERHOUSE: 10 11 MS HAWKINS: Correct. So they're admitted under the care 12 of a geriatrician and then we've got 19 patients currently 13 under the care of a geriatrician that are outliers, and then five of those patients are currently in the emergency 14 15 department. 16 17 In terms of C7 east aged care, we have five patients or actually, sorry, six patients - currently that are 18 19 awaiting Coledale hospital for nursing home placement. We 20 had one transferred this morning, which was awaiting GEM, 21 and the remaining patients are currently under an acute 22 care type, so they're still under the medical management of the doctor. 23 24 25 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. Ms Pickering --26 THE COMMISSIONER: 27 Can I just ask, Ms Hawkins, were the 28 wards you're talking about - I should really know this, but were they the wards that I had a site visit of? I think 29 they were, yes. 30 31 32 MS HAWKINS: Correct. So B3 east geriatrics is our 33 permanent 25-bed geriatric ward, and then C7 east is 34 currently utilised as a surge ward for geriatrics, so you visited both those wards. 35 36 37 THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you for that. 38 Just to add, in terms of the statistics of 39 MS HAWKINS: 40 those patients, so we currently have - I have the 41 statistics from yesterday, which was we had four patients bed boarded to Coledale - the length of stay for our 42 43 longest length of stay was 212 days. On C7 east it was 34. 44 That patient was bed boarded since 1 May 2024. The next 45 patient is at 89 days' length of stay at Wollongong 46 Hospital, with a total length of stay on C7 east at That patient was ready for step-down from 47 31 days.

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1 16 September 2024. 2 3 The next patient is at 111 days, as a hospital length 4 Length of stay on C7 east aged care is 36, and of stav. 5 has been bed boarded since 14 October. And our last patient, as of the statistics for yesterday, 14 November, 6 7 was at 47 days with a total length of stay on our ward at 8 28 days. They were bed boarded since 2 October and ready 9 for transfer. 10 THE COMMISSIONER: 11 My notes have a reference to "C7 west". 12 Did I just get my compass wrong or --13 Yes. 14 MS HAWKINS: C7 west is a different ward. 15 16 THE COMMISSIONER: That makes perfect sense, if you knew 17 The other ward I just wrote as "aged care ward". Is me. 18 that one of the wards you're talking about? 19 20 Correct. So C7 east aged care is our surge MS HAWKINS: 21 ward and then B3 east is our 25-bed permanent geriatric 22 ward. 23 24 THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you. 25 If I can go to the Central Coast for 26 DR WATERHOUSE: 27 a moment, can you tell me, Ms Pickering, do you have 28 similar experience there in terms of some of those causes 29 of the delays? 30 31 MS PICKERING: Yes, we do. I think, as I started before, 32 the family choosing a facility is probably one of the big 33 areas that we find quite challenging and causing delays. 34 Families will often go and inspect a facility and decide that, for whatever reason, it's not right for their loved 35 36 one, and so then they go and look at a second and a third 37 and sometimes a fourth. 38 Just to note that last month we did receive, via the 39 40 ministry, some guidance to support trying to facilitate and 41 empower families to make a decision with no more than two choices. That's something that we'll be empowering and 42 43 working with our staff to work with families towards, with, 44 I guess, the conversation around, with the family, that if 45 they, on their second choice, are still not 100 per cent 46 satisfied, that they transfer with the view of looking, and when the - once the facility that they're after is 47

1 available, that they can then transition across. 2 3 I guess the other challenges are those older people 4 with challenging behaviours and facilities, I guess, 5 accepting some of these older people into their residence. 6 7 Also at times we do have older people that have been 8 assessed that then do become acutely unwell in that period, 9 so then they become too unwell for transfer. 10 Just on the family situation, are there 11 DR WATERHOUSE: 12 any financial incentives, perhaps, to let an elderly 13 patient just stay in hospital because it's going to cost them money to be able to move them out? 14 15 16 MS PICKERING: Look, I think that's potentially a factor 17 that the family members consider. I think part of the 18 guidance that has come out, as I mentioned, last month from 19 the ministry also supports that care type change and 20 letting families know that there will potentially be a cost 21 attributed with an older person staying in an acute 22 facility that is no longer acute care. 23 24 DR WATERHOUSE: That is something that - I hear it has 25 come out last month, is that a new arrangement 26 altogether --27 28 MS PICKERING: No. 29 DR WATERHOUSE: -- or is that something that just hasn't 30 31 been happening in a coordinated way perhaps? 32 33 MS PICKERING: It's not so much a new arrangement, it's 34 something that's, I guess, providing more guidance and support from the ministry level for us to be able to enact 35 36 and empower with our staff. 37 In terms of how it plays out in the ward 38 DR WATERHOUSE: at Wyong, can you give an outline of the sorts of patients 39 40 that you have there waiting for long periods of time, 41 beyond the acute care they need, Ms Okulicz? 42 43 MS OKULICZ: It's mostly the behavioural patients, Yes. 44 the patients with challenging behaviours. We have to try 45 to medically treat them first and make sure that we can get 46 the - can we modify their behaviours using medications to make them suitable because facilities won't take them 47

1 whilst they are having significantly challenging 2 behaviours. 3 4 We've also got issues regarding guardianship, those 5 delavs as well. So if patients can't make decisions for themselves or don't have capacity and are refusing to go, 6 7 then we need to go down the guardianship pathway and, 8 unfortunately, in their best interests take their 9 decision-making rights away from them, so it either gets 10 allocated to a family member or it can be to a guardian. 11 DR WATERHOUSE: 12 How long does that guardianship process 13 take? 14 MS OKULICZ: It's significant. So we have to go through 15 16 all the assessments first of what the patient - treat the 17 patient first for what they're going through. Then we have 18 to assess their capacity, which can either be like 19 occupational therapist, social worker, neuro psych team, 20 It sometimes takes multiple people to do geriatrician. 21 those assessments. 22 23 Then once it is seen that they don't have capacity and 24 we're going place them against their wishes, we then have 25 to do all the letters and then that starts a seven-day process where all the doctors, the social worker and 26 27 everyone who's involved write their letters. 28 29 Then that gets submitted to NCAT, the guardianship Then they receive it and then they can take three 30 board. 31 weeks before they give us a hearing date and then that 32 could be three to six weeks before we get then a hearing 33 Then we have the hearing, then it gets allocated, date. 34 and then the process of trying to find a suitable 35 residential aged care facility can start. 36 37 Then, once it's found, that goes back to the guardianship board with everything submitted for their 38 recommendation for placement and then the guardian can then 39 40 take seven to 10 days to accept that place and put - do all 41 their paperwork. Then we can get given a transfer date, 42 which can be another week. So you're looking at up to, 43 like, three months from beginning to end for that patient. 44 45 DR WATERHOUSE: So to be clear, that is three months 46 starting from when they cease to need acute care in a 47 hospital?

1 MS OKULICZ: 2 Correct. 3 4 DR WATERHOUSE: They are just in the ward? 5 MS OKULICZ: Yes. 6 7 8 DR WATERHOUSE: Are there ways that you can do some things Can you be looking for an aged care 9 simultaneously? 10 facility at the same time as they're going through the process on the expectation --11 12 13 MS OKULICZ: Yes, some families can. Some families are 14 But also it depends on what the willing to do that. outcome is, because they may find a facility but they need 15 16 to work out is it an appropriate facility for them, because 17 we also have lots that need specific memory support units 18 going forward, and they have very limited beds, especially on the Central Coast. 19 20 21 I've had one lady recently, that was only discharged 22 on Monday, she had been with me for about 150 days from beginning to end, and then we finally found a facility, but 23 24 that was because the family were willing to consider other areas and she actually got transferred to Belrose, in 25 26 Sydney, because we couldn't get any suitable bed on the 27 Central Coast. 28 29 DR WATERHOUSE: How many patients would you have at any given time, going through that guardianship process? 30 31 32 MS OKULICZ: It can range from one to four, typically. 33 It's very variable. But I think four or five, Yes. 34 I think, is the most I've had at any one time. 35 36 DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Shortis, can I just ask you, from the Nepean Blue Mountains' point of view, do you have 37 familiarity with the sorts of things that are keeping 38 patients in hospital, aged care patients or the NDIS 39 40 patients? 41 42 MR SHORTIS: Not enough to speak on, no. 43 44 DR WATERHOUSE: Did you want to make any comment at all in 45 relation to that? 46 No, thank you. 47 MR SHORTIS:

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1 2 DR WATERHOUSE: I think, Professor Potter, you wanted to 3 make a comment about this? 4 5 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, and just to say that in relation to what you were saying about cost, which might be 6 7 a disincentive to families, there is a maintenance fee, so 8 when a patient is type changed to maintenance, which means 9 they no longer require acute or rehabilitation care, 10 they're ready to be discharged, they are charged a weekly maintenance fee. 11 12 13 It's an absolute trivial amount compared to what a 14 family would have to pay for a bond for an aged care So you're talking around \$20 a week compared to 15 facility. 16 a minimum of maybe a 500,000 bond. So there's obviously an 17 incentive, and particularly in Illawarra Shoalhaven, where 18 we cannot offer any dementia specific beds within the region, so you're saying to a family, \$20 a week versus 19 20 500,000, and you are going to have to travel to Sydney or 21 elsewhere. So it's a huge disadvantage. 22 23 DR WATERHOUSE: Am I right in understanding that the 24 amount that you can charge is set by --25 26 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes. 27 28 DR WATERHOUSE: Is that by the ministry or is that 29 a Commonwealth rate or how --30 PROFESSOR POTTER: 31 I think it's a Commonwealth rate in 32 negotiation with the ministry but it's an absolute 33 fraction. It's really --34 Yes, understood. 35 DR WATERHOUSE: 36 Ms Okulicz, could I --37 38 THE COMMISSIONER: Sorry. Professor Potter, when you are 39 using the term "500,000 bond", you're referring to the RAD, 40 41 are you, the refundable deposit? 42 **PROFESSOR POTTER:** 43 Yes, yes. 44 45 THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, thanks. 46 47 DR WATERHOUSE: They still have to come up with that in

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1 the beginning, even if they're going to get it back in the 2 longer term, is that the point? 3 4 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, and if they get it back in the 5 longer term, they're not - you know, fees are going to be taken out for how long they are in there. 6 And again there has been a whole load of speculation in the literature and 7 8 in the news stories about whether that's a fair and 9 equitable process or not, and I couldn't really comment, 10 but it's certainly debatable. 11 12 DR WATERHOUSE: Now, I'm aware that Mr Wakeling has his 13 hand up but Ms Okulicz also wanted to add something, I think. 14 15 16 MS OKULICZ: Yes, in regards to the maintenance care, my 17 understanding for Central Coast, it was \$67 a day, potentially, that's charged for the maintenance period, but 18 19 there are ways families can avoid paying that as well. 20 There's a hardship form that they can submit as well. So 21 we can go through the maintenance process and they get 22 charged the daily rate, which is basically the same - like 23 a respite bed daily rate, but families can submit 24 a hardship form and not --25 26 DR WATERHOUSE: And who decides whether that hardship 27 requirement is met? 28 29 MS OKULICZ: That is decided by the cashier, sorry, the manager - sorry, I know her name but I don't know her role. 30 31 32 DR WATERHOUSE: Somebody in a management role within the 33 district? 34 35 MS OKULICZ: A management role within the clerks. Thev work together with the finance department and determine if 36 37 it is hardship and they meet the criteria. 38 DR WATERHOUSE: 39 Thank you. 40 41 Mr Wakeling, you wanted to add something? 42 43 MR WAKELING: Yes, thank you, Dr Waterhouse. Just in 44 support of the payment that Professor Potter raised and the 45 representative from Wyong, the average cost per bed day for 46 a maintenance patient at the Illawarra Shoalhaven is 47 \$1,014, so the payment that those maintenance patients are

1 paying is, as Professor Potter said, a very fraction of the 2 cost of the LHD to run that bed. 3 4 DR WATERHOUSE: In other words, not only is it a fraction 5 of what they would be paying if they had the person placed in an aged care facility, it's also a fraction of what it 6 7 is actually costing you to staff that bed? 8 9 MR WAKELING: Yes. 10 Understood, thank you. 11 DR WATERHOUSE: 12 13 Can I just touch on whether or not, in the Central 14 Coast - do you know if you have lost beds in the same way as Professor Potter was saying, with COVID and so on and 15 16 the Royal Commission, has there been the closure of a lot 17 of beds there? 18 MS PICKERING: 19 I am aware that there have been some 20 I couldn't tell you how many beds, but facilities closed. 21 I don't think we've seen a large closure compared to what 22 others have. 23 DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Shortis, I think that one of the things 24 25 that you said when we met recently was you referred to the fact that a lot of aged care patients may no longer be 26 27 seeing their general practitioners. Can you just expand on 28 why you feel that that's occurring or why you see that 29 happening? 30 31 MR SHORTIS: In Nepean Blue Mountains, one of the issues 32 that we have is there's not a huge number of GPs, so the 33 GPs are actually hard to get into, the clients themselves can't attend, can't get an appointment, can't get one 34 35 within a timely fashion. There's just not the GPs 36 available to see there, and then combined with the mobility 37 issues of some of our clients and the lack of availability of home visits, they just can't get to their GPs as often 38 39 as they would like. 40 41 DR WATERHOUSE: What is the flow-on effect from the point 42 of view of the district? 43 44 MR SHORTIS: From the point of view of the district, we 45 have patients who potentially could have been treated in 46 their home environment whose care isn't what's required, and so they become more unwell and they are admitted to 47

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1 facilities. 2 3 Are there financial impediments to them DR WATERHOUSE: 4 being able to see general practice as well or do they 5 mostly bulk bill them? 6 7 My understanding is that most of the general MR SHORTIS: 8 practices in the area I work in don't bulk bill the 9 majority of their clients. They do bulk bill based on an 10 individual assessment. 11 Professor Potter, I was going to go to you 12 DR WATERHOUSE: 13 next, yes. 14 PROFESSOR POTTER: 15 Just to say in regards to GPs and fees, 16 there's a huge financial disadvantage to general 17 practitioners to go into aged care facilities. They can 18 make, you know, far more for their practice by seeing 19 patients in five-, 10-minute appointments within their 20 surgery if the patients come to them, rather than going to 21 an aged care facility to see patients where they could be 22 there for many hours, they struggle to get nursing staff to 23 accompany them, the prescribing systems and electronic 24 writing systems are completely separate from their own. 25 It's not a very streamlined system at all and there's a huge disadvantage to patients, and to GPs, for trying to 26 In the Illawarra Shoalhaven, we have a number 27 go in there. 28 of facilities where the only GP input they can have is 29 telehealth from Victoria, which in reality, if you're trying to assess a frail elderly patient with multiple 30 31 comorbidities who you've never met before, it really can't 32 be done very effectively by telehealth. 33 34 DR WATERHOUSE: In those circumstances where their only general practitioner is a telehealth service from Victoria, 35 36 is there a lower threshold for just sending a person to 37 hospital if there's anything wrong with them? 38 PROFESSOR POTTER: There is often no alternative. 39 You 40 now, in an acute crisis, you'll only be able to get the 41 telehealth person at certain times, it's all very, you know, office hours, and so they feel - I think, you know, 42 in terms of the aged care facilities, they feel as if they 43 44 have no alternative. We have put in place, and we're trying to expand, a number of strategies to support the 45 46 facilities, which we can talk about later if you wish. 47

1 DR WATERHOUSE: One thing I wanted to ask, is it 2 a requirement, in order to be able to go into a residential 3 aged care facility that you must have a nominated general 4 practitioner? 5 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes. Once you leave the hospital 6 7 you're no longer under the care of any medical provider, so 8 the aged care facility has an obligation to have a GP for 9 vou. So often, as they were saying for Wyong, if an 10 elderly person has been with the same practice for 40 years 11 but we're now having to place them in an out-of-area 12 facility, that GP has even less of an incentive to see that patient if they're now many, many miles away from the 13 14 So often the facilities will try to have practice. a contract with a local practice, or when they can't get 15 16 that, this is where the Victorian telehealth system is 17 occurring. 18 19 DR WATERHOUSE: So to be clear, it's the facility's 20 responsibility to find a general practitioner for their 21 patients; is that right? 22 23 PROFESSOR POTTER: I'm not 100 per cent sure whose 24 responsibility, it's either the family or the facility, but 25 it's not the hospital, but it's often a barrier to how we 26 can get the patient out. 27 28 DR WATERHOUSE: Just one thing I want to touch on, and 29 I know we'll look at some solutions a bit later, but I understand there is a general practice in aged care, an 30 31 incentive that's been started recently. Do you have a view 32 on whether that is likely to be successful? 33 34 PROFESSOR POTTER: Look, I don't know the details of it. 35 I have followed this loosely, but I understand that the 36 Commonwealth has recognised that there is a disincentive financially for GPs and that they are looking at trying to 37 improve the fees for general practitioners to go into aged 38 care facilities. 39 40 41 I know locally, we have a couple of practices, GP practices, who are very interested in the local facilities 42 43 and have tried to organise a set roster and make it work. 44 So there is goodwill out there, it's not a problem amongst 45 our general practitioner colleagues; it's the structure and 46 the functions and the policies that are surrounding them. 47

1 THE COMMISSIONER: I think it's a payment per patient that 2 you have, of like \$300 for each patient you've got as a GP 3 on your books, for going to see people in aged care, rather 4 than a - I could be wrong about this, but rather than 5 a change to the item number when you actually - I think 6 that's right. 7 8 DR WATERHOUSE: Yes, a bit like the bulk-billing 9 incentives. 10 THE COMMISSIONER: Yes. 11 12 13 DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Wakeling, are you able to comment at all on general practice and the access for the NDIS 14 15 patients that you have waiting long periods? 16 17 MR WAKELING: No, I cannot. Nothing further to add. 18 19 DR WATERHOUSE: If I can just look at the Central Coast 20 aspect, is access to general practice or general 21 practitioners, I should say, an impediment there in terms 22 of some of the aged care patients that you see, and NDIS for that matter? 23 24 25 MS OKULICZ: Yes, absolutely. There is a significant lack of GPs on the Central Coast. There have been a couple of 26 urgent care centres that have been opened by the government 27 28 there, which has sort of helped the community but it hasn't 29 reduced the ED presentations at all, and there is a significant amount of people presenting to the ED instead 30 31 of a GP: one, because they can't get in; two, they don't 32 have one; and, because this is a low socioeconomic area, 33 they can't afford the GP fee because none of them 34 consistently bulk bill, so then they do present to the 35 hospital instead. 36 Two things, is that talking generally 37 DR WATERHOUSE: about the population or is that specifically an aged care 38 39 issue that you're referring to? 40 41 MS OKULICZ: Both. It is the population, but again, yes, the older persons on the Central Coast, they can't afford 42 their GP services. 43 44 45 DR WATERHOUSE: Are these urgent care centres that are set 46 up by the state or the Commonwealth Government? 47

1 MS PICKERING: So we have one that's state funded, that is 2 under the governance of Central Coast Local Health 3 District, and we have two Commonwealth funded urgent care 4 services, and there are some other private sort of 5 facilities that are popping up on the Central Coast also. 6 But they charge. 7 8 DR WATERHOUSE: I just want to go back to what we were 9 talking about before with the guardianship delays. Is that 10 something, Ms Pickering, that's across the board in terms of Central Coast or is it a specific Wyong issue? 11 12 13 MS PICKERING: No. I would suggest it is across the 14 board. I am aware that, even in our sub-acute facility 15 down at Woy Woy, they also experience some significant 16 delays with guardianship process, as Amy had described. 17 Mr Shortis, do you know if this is an 18 DR WATERHOUSE: 19 issue that's encountered in Nepean Blue Mountains? 20 21 MR SHORTIS: I believe so. 22 DR WATERHOUSE: 23 What about on the Central Coast? Mavbe Ms Hawkins, are you able to comment on whether you have 24 25 a lot of patients awaiting guardianship applications? 26 Currently between C7 east and B3 east, we 27 MS HAWKINS: 28 currently have one patient awaiting a guardianship hearing. 29 Based on the "waiting for what" for the B3 east patient. that's dated the 23rd of the 9th. 30 31 32 DR WATERHOUSE: Is that one patient an anomaly or do you 33 normally have more than that? Is it a significant issue for you? 34 35 Patients awaiting NCAT hearings, we do see 36 MS HAWKINS: In terms of an exact number, I don't 37 a frequency of those. have that exact number, but there is a high frequency of 38 patients that are requiring NCAT, and that's more for 39 40 coercive orders regarding accommodation and/or finances. 41 DR WATERHOUSE: 42 Do they tend to have the same lengthy 43 delays that were described by Ms Okulicz? 44 45 MS HAWKINS: Correct, yes. That's in regards to the 46 preplanning process to actually get them to the point of the NCAT hearing, and then also from the point of NCAT 47

1 hearing to a decision, there can be lengthy processes, yes. 2 It can be weeks to months. 3 4 DR WATERHOUSE: Professor Potter, did you want to add 5 something about that? 6 PROFESSOR POTTER: 7 Yes. In the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local 8 Health District, the two main acute hospitals are 9 Wollongong Hospital, which Rachael Hawkins is referring to, 10 and Shoalhaven Hospital. There are then five other sub-acute hospitals, and the majority of the patients 11 12 waiting for guardianship have already left the acute 13 hospital and gone to the sub-acute hospitals. So the 14 numbers in the sub-acute hospitals are always going to be 15 higher. 16 17 Wollongong is our main tertiary level 6 hospital, so 18 once we've ruled out most of the acute things, we will try 19 to prioritise them to go to one of the sub-acute sites, so 20 the numbers there will be much higher than at Wollongong. 21 22 DR WATERHOUSE: Understood. And do you have a sense form your role about how many those are, or maybe I could go to 23 24 Mr Wakeling about that, as to how many guardianship 25 patients there are waiting in hospitals? 26 27 PROFESSOR POTTER: It comes and goes. It tends to come in 28 runs, as these things do, but I would say on average it's 29 around two to 10, but there's always the lengthy delays as You know, with guardianship, we've actually done 30 well. 31 some work with our local guardianship board and we have 32 attempted to streamline this, but still, inevitably, with 33 more complicated patients not in acute geriatric wards, 34 scattered through the hospital, you've got teams and specialists and social workers who are not experienced in 35 36 managing that type of patient, so that leads to delays in 37 getting the recognition that they need guardianship and then delays in accessing the relevant reports to go to the 38 guardianship tribunal. So I think because we've got such 39 40 a big population not in the appropriate wards, it just 41 exaggerates everything. 42 43 DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Wakeling, did you want to add Okay. 44 anything in relation to the guardianship tribunal patients? 45 46 MR WAKELING: Before I - sorry, I'm just looking up Yes. 47 the live system that might help. In regards to the way we

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monitor guardianship delays, all of us in the room will use 1 2 the patient flow portal, the NSW Health online system that 3 is our primary operational tool to monitor access and flow, 4 any delays, inter hospital transports, et cetera. 5 Currently at Illawarra Shoalhaven, according to our 6 "waiting for whats", which we enter, and the likes of 7 8 Rachael, being a NUM, will review every day, there are nine 9 patients waiting a guardianship decision at Illawarra 10 Shoalhaven. 11 If I could just go back to make a comment about the 12 13 urgent care centres and how that support through the 14 Commonwealth may help the aged care, it is my opinion - and I also work casually as a registered nurse at our local 15 16 urgent care centre that's administered by the LHD - that that is not a solution for primary care for older persons 17 who really need a detailed assessment of all their 18 19 comorbidities, a medication review, et cetera, that 20 Professor Potter could expand on. 21 22 The target audience for urgent care centres is the 23 cohort in between a GP and the emergency department, and in 24 my observation at our local urgent care centre, it's primarily paediatrics with bumps and bruises, potential 25 26 fractures, et cetera, cellulitis that's not septic, a quick 27 and easy assessment, or lacerations. So very much the 28 minor injury cohort. 29 Those urgent care centres are not staffed by GPs 30 31 primarily, they're GP ED VMO type models in our area who 32 just want those minor injuries. That's the gap that's 33 there to fill. Thank you. 34 THE COMMISSIONER: I don't think they were - they're not 35 advertised, and I don't think they were set up, to be 36 a substitute for primary care. If you actually look it up 37 online, it's all what they describe as - it's an urgent 38 service you need but not an ED service. You know, as you 39 40 say, like a burn, a cut, after-hours, you can't see your 41 GP - you may not go to your GP in any event for a cut, who knows - but it's certainly not got the - they weren't 42 43 devised to have that continuity of care that you get from 44 a GP providing primary care. 45 46 DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Hawkins, I think you wanted to say 47 something; is that right?

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1 2 MS HAWKINS: I just had further detail to support for the 3 guardianship status. So across the district, we've 4 currently - there is 11. At stage 1, which is 5 guardianship 1 "waiting for what" we have three. We've got five waiting at guardianship 3, which is waiting 6 7 a hearing date, and we've got three waiting a public 8 guardian to be appointed, and that's only relevant to the 9 geriatric patients currently waiting. 10 DR WATERHOUSE: 11 And you've used the term "waiting for 12 what", as have a couple of others. Can you define what 13 that means for the court? Is that a term that is used 14 consistently through the system? 15 16 MS HAWKINS: Benjamin will be able to probably comment a 17 little bit more, but as a nurse unit manager, the way we use our "waiting for what" is as a part of an escalation 18 19 process and also to map as a part of where that patient is 20 currently waiting for certain processes within the hospital 21 So "waiting for whats", in particular how we use svstem. 22 it in aged care, could be for diagnostics, and that's 23 typically when a patient is waiting 24 or more hours, and 24 also more in regards to our NDIS, our residential care and 25 also for transport, when they're awaiting a hospital bed 26 elsewhere, and the transport for that. 27 28 DR WATERHOUSE: So is it fair to say is that, basically, 29 it's a list that gives you oversight to know exactly why 30 each patient is in hospital and waiting for something as 31 opposed to having an acute procedure or whatever? 32 33 MS HAWKINS: Correct. 34 DR WATERHOUSE: 35 Did you want to add anything to that, 36 Mr Wakeling, before I go to people in the room? 37 38 MR WAKELING: Yes, thanks, Dr Waterhouse. So the "waiting for whats" are not just for the residential aged care or 39 40 NDIS delays. 41 42 MS HAWKINS: Correct. 43 44 They are for all delays through the system MR WAKELING: 45 to try and make it as operationally efficient as possible. 46 So, as Rachael alluded to, it might be for an image, 47 a test, a procedure, et cetera, something related to the

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1 discharge process, a referral by someone or a consult, or 2 a transfer or transport to another ward or another 3 hospital. 4 5 At Wollongong Hospital - well, at Illawarra Shoalhaven more broadly, residential aged care or inter-hospital 6 transfers, which I will expand on when we talk about the 7 8 challenges and impacts in access and flow, is by far and 9 away our largest delay. Thank you. 10 DR WATERHOUSE: We will cover that in a moment. 11 12 13 Ms Pickering, were you going to say something before? 14 I guess, just going back to the urgent care 15 MS PICKERING: 16 services, so the one that we have that's under the LHD 17 governance on the Central Coast, as Ben mentioned, is for episodic care, really targeting those triage 4/5 type 18 19 category patients I quess as an alternative to ED and not 20 just for the older person. 21 22 We do have primarily probably GP VMO staffing in our urgent care service, and I guess that does help, although 23 they - the transfer of care is certainly back to their GP, 24 with a plan of care to try and encourage them to really 25 26 link back into their GP for any further interventions and 27 ongoing care needs. 28 Okay. And just looking at barriers in 29 DR WATERHOUSE: terms of NDIS patients for a moment, I think you said 30 31 something about the fact that they present to the emergency 32 department to expedite regrading. Can you comment on that? 33 Are you aware of that? 34 MS PICKERING: I don't think that was me. 35 36 DR WATERHOUSE: That's fine. 37 38 39 Mr Shortis, are you engaged with sort of delays with 40 NDIS patients and familiar with the sorts of causes? 41 42 MR SHORTIS: I tend to the work in the community, so it is after their discharge. The "waiting for what" is part of 43 44 the bed board, which is an inpatient system. So I'm aware 45 of it, but it's not something I use regularly. 46 When you get patients who are on the 47 DR WATERHOUSE:

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NDIS - I assume you have some of those within your
 community health --

4 MR SHORTIS: We do.

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DR WATERHOUSE: -- for what sorts of reasons have they been waiting some time before coming to you, do you know?

9 MR SHORTIS: It can be around providing staff to provide the appropriate care. 10 So one of the common things that the service I work with does with NDIS patients is wound care 11 12 and we tend to run into two issues with wound care. Some 13 of the wound care can be funded underneath the NDIS, some of it will be funded underneath health, and we find that 14 stuff that can be funded underneath the NDIS is often -15 16 they try to push it back to health, and the other problem 17 that we run into is they don't actually have the staff that 18 are able to do the dressings or provide the care.

DR WATERHOUSE: So what is it? Is it about the sort of dressings and things that are needed that are pushed back onto health or is it more about the skill set required to manage a complex wound?

25 MR SHORTIS: It's actually a bit of both. For some of the 26 simpler dressings, we find that we're often training the 27 NDIS care workers in how to do that, and for some of the 28 complex wounds, there just aren't the staff in the 29 community, other than NSW Health staff who have the skills 30 to attend to that care.

DR WATERHOUSE: And who is doing the pushing back when you describe that between the two systems?

35 MR SHORTIS: Usually it is the NDIS care coordinators.

37 DR WATERHOUSE: Is that because they either don't have the 38 budget or they don't have the skilled staff to be able to 39 do it generally?

41 MR SHORTIS: That is my understanding.

DR WATERHOUSE: Do you have any patients on the NDIS that
have difficulty getting out of hospital because of
accommodation issues - ie, they have nowhere to go? Is
that something that you encounter in community health?

1 MR SHORTIS: It's not something that I've encountered in 2 my role but I do believe that is an issue in the district. 3 4 DR WATERHOUSE: I can see Ms Okulicz nodding to that. Is 5 there something that you want to comment on there? 6 7 MS OKULICZ: I can speak to the two NDIS patients that 8 have been on my unit. They are not geriatric, they were 9 actually quite young, and the reason that they presented to 10 hospital is that they had severe aggression and violence episodes towards their carers, where carers were 11 12 significantly injured. So then they were brought in to hospital to be cared for, and then we had to sort of set up 13 14 isolation areas and have security guards and one-on-one 15 nursing to provide them care. 16 17 Then we had issues around where the care provider 18 didn't want them back because of the danger that they were 19 to their staff, and then there wasn't a suitable house 20 because one particular person had done so much damage to 21 the place that they couldn't go back. 22 23 So then you've got barriers of, yes, care providers 24 not wanting them back due to the risk to their staff and they're not trained and they don't have enough funding to 25 provide the staff and they don't have suitable 26 27 accommodation. 28 29 Most NDIS patients are under the age of 65, so they're not actually aged care persons. If they're over the age of 30 31 65, there is usually a conversation about whether they will 32 transition from the NDIS to an aged care pension and then 33 into an RACF, because a lot of RACFs won't accept patients 34 on the NDIS program because of the paperwork that's involved. 35 36 37 We have had one person that was the age of 70 who was on the NDIS and we were trying to get him to transition to 38 an aged care pension but he refused to do so. 39 So then we 40 had delays trying to find a suitable aged care facility 41 that would accept his NDIS plan and continue on that. 42 43 DR WATERHOUSE: So just to walk through that in a little 44 bit more detail, you've got a person who has a behavioural issue of some sort, and they have injured somebody else, 45 46 but they themselves are not injured. They themselves are 47 not unwell.

1 MS OKULICZ: 2 No. 3 4 DR WATERHOUSE: Their behavioural condition is not a delirium that is treatable, or something of that nature. 5 6 MS OKULICZ: 7 Correct. 8 9 DR WATERHOUSE: But the default is to send them to 10 hospital because they can't be managed safely in the --11 MS OKULICZ: Their own home. 12 13 DR WATERHOUSE: 14 -- residential facility, or sorry, the 15 NDIS accommodation, or whatever that they are living in. 16 So they send them to hospital. 17 MS OKULICZ: 18 Mmm-hmm. 19 20 DR WATERHOUSE: What happens when they're in hospital? 21 Are they admitted under someone? Do they get assessed or 22 is it just a case of boarding them there, effectively, until an alternative --23 24 25 MS OKULICZ: They're usually admitted under a general medicine physician and then sometimes we look at 26 medications - can their medications be adjusted to modify 27 28 their behaviours? Sometimes they just - it's just a matter 29 of they lashed out because they were unhappy, so then it's like they have to get admitted because their care provider 30 31 refuses to take them back and we can't discharge them if 32 they're refusing to take them, so then we have to 33 accommodate them in the hospital. 34 35 The two youngest ones with the most significant 36 behaviours that we've had this year have stayed - both of 37 them were about four months, because then we had to get a plan review, potentially increased funding, an increase 38 in care providers that could be with them 24/7, then a new 39 40 appropriate house had to be sourced, and then they had to 41 do all their assessments, their OT assessments and - to make sure the house was suitable and - yes, so it takes -42 it took about four months for both of them. 43 44 45 DR WATERHOUSE: Do you know if any of the cost of their 46 care while they're with you is being covered by the funding 47 under their NDIS plan?

1 MS OKULICZ: 2 No. 3 4 DR WATERHOUSE: No, it is not, or no, you don't know? 5 MS OKULICZ: 6 No, it's not being covered. 7 8 DR WATERHOUSE: It's not being covered? 9 10 MS OKULICZ: Yes. And these patients have required 24 hours' security, sometimes two security guards 24 hours, 11 and a one-on-one nurse as well. So one of the gentlemen 12 that I had for about four months, his security bill alone 13 was \$100,000, and that came out of my unit's budget. 14 15 16 DR WATERHOUSE: Do your staff have any particular training to deal with these very complex behavioural disorders? 17 18 19 They do have violence and aggression MS OKULICZ: 20 That is limited. They do attend a one-day training. 21 session. But it is usually directed at an older person, 22 managing those behaviours. But the gentleman that was in my ward, he was 6 foot 3 and about 120 kilos, so even that 23 24 training, with my female nursing staff, wouldn't have 25 managed much. 26 27 DR WATERHOUSE: To be clear, though, it doesn't need 28 clinical training to do that, so the care workers in an 29 NDIS accommodation home could do that training: it wouldn't require a nursing degree to do that? 30 31 32 MS OKULICZ: No. 33 34 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. 35 36 I might just go to Mr Wakeling. I think he had 37 a comment to make about this. 38 Thanks, Dr Waterhouse. 39 MR WAKELING: I can just expand on 40 the NDIS patients that the person from Wyong gave evidence 41 on from an emergency department perspective, being an 42 emergency clinician. 43 44 So when these patients come in, they may or may not be 45 scheduled under a Mental Health Act, either by the police 46 or the ambulance, because they're unsafe to themselves or 47 unsafe to the community.

1 2 What we would normally do is rule out any medical or 3 organic causes that have triggered this abnormal behaviour, 4 be it an infection, or looking for other tumours in the 5 brain or anything else in the brain that's causing this 6 abnormal behaviour. It would require blood tests, it would 7 require a CT scan, a urine sample. We usually would do 8 a urine drug screen, because it may be linked to substance 9 abuse. And we require all that before we, as the emergency 10 team, are able to refer to another specialty, be it general medicine or the mental health team, for them to make 11 12 a decision on this patient's care.

14 They cause significant disruption in the emergency 15 department because, as suggested, they do need one-on-one 16 type care and they are scheduled under the Act so we need 17 to look after them. They may or may not need sedation or 18 restraint to make it safe for them and the other staff 19 members to provide the tasks that I mentioned before 20 a decision can be made. Thank you.

22 DR WATERHOUSE: I just want to follow up on something 23 about that, and it sort of goes to the difference, I guess, 24 between the aged care patients and the NDIS patients. Is my understanding correct, at least from the point of view 25 26 of Illawarra to start with - and I will come to you as 27 well - that when it comes to the aged care patients, most 28 of them that don't need to be in hospital are there because 29 they are waiting a first-time placement in aged care, but when it comes to the NDIS patients, a lot of them are 30 31 already under the NDIS but they've come in because the 32 system is not working for them in the community; is that 33 correct?

MR WAKELING: That could be an assumption that I say is correct, yes, thank you.

38 DR WATERHOUSE: I think I might go first to Ms Hawkins.

40 MS HAWKINS: So it's dual. They're often waiting their 41 first nursing home placement or they're patients that have been in a nursing home, have not been able to be managed in 42 43 regards to their behaviours, that bed has then been 44 declined by the facility and then they present to us for 45 a period of medical management and then they're needing to 46 be placed in a new nursing home. So it's both. 47

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1 DR WATERHOUSE: And do you have a sense of the proportions 2 of the two? 3 4 MS HAWKINS: It's more often that it's a new nursing home 5 placement but there has been an emerging trend in terms of 6 patients that are needing a second nursing home placement 7 found because a facility is not able to manage their 8 behaviours, and rightly so, the behaviours that we have 9 seen that have come through, they are significant 10 behaviours of concern that have needed to be managed as an 11 inpatient. 12 13 DR WATERHOUSE: Understood. Professor Potter I think is 14 keen to say something. 15 16 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, I would agree with Ben and 17 Rachael. It's more often for the aged care patients that they are people who have not managed anymore in the 18 19 community and there's nothing reversible, however, the 20 group who come in from aged care facilities and those 21 facilities are refusing to take them back - often for 22 appropriate reasons - that group represents a much bigger 23 use of our bed base because they are very much more 24 difficult to discharge, in particular because, as I said, of the complete lack of dementia-specific beds in our 25 26 district and the lack of any willingness to build any more 27 of them. So that group is expanding all the time. 28 29 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. 30 31 Ms Okulicz, you were going to say something? 32 33 MS OKULICZ: Just in regards to NDIS, we do have a number 34 of new NDIS applications, and they're usually related to our stroke patients or some of our rehabilitation patients 35 36 who have gone through a process. So they've come in, had a cerebral event, they've now got a deficiency and so then 37 they've got a disability and can no longer go home or need 38 significant care to go home, so then a new NDIS application 39 40 needs to be made and then that has similar delays as a plan 41 review. 42 43 DR WATERHOUSE: So that's to become a participant as 44 opposed to having a regrade, effectively? 45 46 MS OKULICZ: So we do have both. We have becoming 47 a participant and a review of plan participants.

1 2 DR WATERHOUSE: In terms of your aged care patients, do you have a proportion, like Ms Hawkins, that are brand new 3 4 placements as opposed to people that are just not coping or 5 the nursing home can't cope with them? 6 7 MS OKULICZ: We have a mix of - like, come in from the 8 community, families can no longer care for them, and then we're following down the RACF pathway, or they've been in 9 10 an RACF, their care needs have changed and they've become their dementia has progressed and their behaviours have 11 12 become too challenging to manage, so they've come into 13 hospital for us to treat and to find any reversible causes, 14 and then look at a new facility that can manage their new ongoing behaviours if it seems that that's now their new 15 16 baseline. 17 18 DR WATERHOUSE: And when you refer to "RACF", that's 19 residential aged care facility? 20 21 MS OKULICZ: Correct, sorry. 22 Okay, that's fine. 23 DR WATERHOUSE: 24 25 Ms Pickering, did you want to add anything to that? 26 MS PICKERING: No, I think what Amy has said is quite 27 28 accurate. 29 DR WATERHOUSE: Do you find that there are families that 30 31 don't cope with either - well, particularly with, 32 I suppose, NDIS participants, they might already have a plan but the family is not coping because there's not 33 34 enough supports in the community for them? 35 36 MS PICKERING: Look, potentially yes. I think what one of 37 the challenges are in the community space in particular is an NDIS participant has an allocated budget for their care 38 39 What we find, and this is more from my community needs. 40 service experience, is we do have, I guess, providers reach 41 out, where the budget has been allocated, and it may not necessarily have been allocated in a way that health may 42 43 see that we might need some allocation. 44 45 So, for example, and as Brendan said, we do have a lot 46 of wound management in the community that we support, where there's an NDIS provider in place, we really do need to be 47

providing that - the capacity building for that provider to 1 2 be able to care for their participant, but often we do 3 hear, "Actually, we don't have any budget left for that. 4 We actually aren't able to provide that element of care." 5 And that has become quite a challenge. 6 7 DR WATERHOUSE: So, effectively, they've got the budget 8 for the 12 months, they've spent the whole budget --9 10 MS PICKERING: Or it has been allocated in a way for that 12 months. 11 12 13 DR WATERHOUSE: And therefore it falls back to the 14 hospital system to pick up - or the health system, I should 15 say. 16 17 Mr Shortis, is that your experience as well? 18 19 MR SHORTIS: Yes. Yes, very definitely. 20 21 DR WATERHOUSE: Does it go beyond wound care? Is it other 22 things too? 23 24 MR SHORTIS: It can be, but, yes, as Ms Pickering said, 25 it's the client or the package chooses to allocate to not 26 in a way that health would necessarily allocate, I'm thinking about a client at the moment who's having their 27 28 dog walked but probably needs their dressing done more 29 importantly. 30 31 DR WATERHOUSE: Do you have a sense that sometimes it's 32 being allocated the way it is because they know that the hospital system can pick up whatever they don't allocate 33 34 to, so they focus on other things that the person might want? 35 36 37 MR SHORTIS: My experience would be it's predominantly the client's choice, that's their goal, to have whatever it is 38 done, and health care comes as a later thing and then, yes, 39 40 it is often left to health to pick up. 41 Mr Wakeling, I think you were going to say 42 DR WATERHOUSE: 43 something, and then I'll move on to the other topics, but 44 I'll give everyone a chance if they want to say anything 45 more about causes? 46 47 MR WAKELING: Thanks, Dr Waterhouse. Just following

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people's comments, I think the hospital system can't refuse care, whereas the residential aged care facility, the NDIS provider, they all have the right to say it's unsafe for their - for the care of the patient or the consumer that's in their care, so the fall-back position is always the local health district or the hospitals.

8 Similar to the example Professor Potter gave, where 9 there's no incentive for the patient awaiting a residential 10 aged care quality to leave the maintenance bed because the financial cost is so low compared to the capital that is 11 12 required to move to a residential aged care facility. We are in, in my observation, a point where it's to our 13 disadvantage, although we are happy to provide their care 14 when it's required and appropriate. Thank you. 15

17 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you.

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19 So before we move on to the effects of all of this on 20 bed flow, can I just check if anyone else wanted to make 21 any other comment about the causes of the problem? 22 Ms Okulicz?

MS OKULICZ: I would also like to raise the limitations of 24 25 our available allied health staff. So we've had 26 a significant reduction in the allied health capacity, like 27 the social workers, occupational therapists and the 28 physiotherapists, and if they can't do their assessments, 29 then that hinders the progress through the hospital system. So if we need an OT assessment and a physiotherapist to 30 31 determine whether the patient is safe to go home or do they 32 need to go, and then they don't see that patient for three 33 to five days due to delays, we've lost a week just waiting 34 for occupational therapy to make that assessment.

36 And then, because we've had surge open in Wyong Hospital as well, so we've had, like, 24 to 26 surge beds 37 open at any given time but there's been no increase in the 38 39 resources for allied health to see those extra patients. 40 I think last week they had three physiotherapists for the 41 entire hospital, so that was a ratio of one to 30 patients for all their referrals. So when you're waiting on 42 43 discharge plans or progress or patients' capacity to be 44 able to go home or what their needs are, then you've got 45 delays just waiting for allied health to come and see those 46 patients.

Just to make sure I understand that 1 DR WATERHOUSE: 2 clearly, when there's an increase in activity, surge beds are opened, meaning temporary beds, effectively? 3 4 5 MS OKULICZ: Mmm-hmm. 6 7 DR WATERHOUSE: Those beds are staffed from a nursing 8 perspective so that the patients have care at the nursing 9 level? 10 MS OKULICZ: 11 Through overtime and casuals. Like, they're not - it's not our --12 13 14 DR WATERHOUSE: You don't appoint extra nurses, 15 I appreciate that. 16 17 MS OKULICZ: No. 18 19 DR WATERHOUSE: But you have nurses counted towards those 20 beds --21 22 MS OKULICZ: Correct. 23 24 DR WATERHOUSE: -- or allocated towards those beds. but 25 there's no change in your allied health capacity, so 26 they're spread more thinly? 27 28 MS OKULICZ: Correct. 29 30 DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Pickering, I know there is casual --31 32 THE COMMISSIONER: Just before you go to Ms Pickering, Ms 33 Okulicz said there had been a "significant reduction in 34 allied health capacity". What should I understand by "significant", and what is the cause of the reduction in 35 36 the allied health capacity? 37 There has been maternity -MS OKULICZ: 38 There was leave. from what I'm aware of, because it's not my department, but 39 40 from what I'm aware of, there's been maternity leave, 41 there's been people going off on, like, annual leave not back-filled, like, whenever somebody is on leave, they're 42 43 not back-filled, there isn't a position for that. There's 44 maternity leave that hasn't been back-filled as well, and 45 then people leaving the district or leaving their positions 46 that they've struggled to recruit to those positions as 47 well.

1 2 THE COMMISSIONER: I see, thank you. 3 4 DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Pickering, just going to the allied 5 health point, do you find that there has been a reduction in allied health people moving out into the private sector 6 to work for NDIS? 7 8 MS PICKERING: 9 Again, it's not my area, but anecdotally, 10 I have heard that, that - well, not just the NDIS but even through aged care providers out in the community, there is 11 12 a greater, I guess, financial incentive for allied health 13 to go from NSW Health out to working in private. 14 And I understand there is a casual nurses 15 DR WATERHOUSE: 16 Is there scope to have a casual pool for allied pool. 17 health staff? 18 MS PICKERING: 19 Potentially. I think that is something 20 that is being considered. 21 22 DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Shortis, do you have any comment in 23 terms of the allied health staffing from the point of view 24 of the community health? 25 26 MR SHORTIS: No. 27 28 DR WATERHOUSE: Okay. Professor Potter, you wanted to say 29 something further about causes? 30 31 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes. It's complicated. So as I said 32 at the beginning, because, in our district, of the 33 proportion of frail elderly people retiring into the 34 district, we have higher numbers of elderly patients than other districts in New South Wales - in fact, we have the 35 36 highest. 37 What that results in is that we have a lot of frail 38 39 elderly patients in the wrong areas of the hospitals under 40 the wrong teams, and what that then means is if you've an 41 allied health specialist who has a particular expertise in orthopaedic surgery, we have a ward where up to a third of 42 43 the patients are frail elderly people with other needs, so 44 you've got the wrong skill set in the wrong places. 45 46 One of the other important things I think to put towards the causes of this is the training institutes don't 47

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1 seem to have caught up with the population demographic. So the colleges, Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of 2 3 Surgeons and the HETI, so the basic physician training, all 4 of those groups consider geriatric medicine as a small 5 sub-specialty, not as the majority of what's coming through the front door of the hospitals, and that leads to all 6 7 sorts of incorrect - for medical staff, so you're not 8 training the right number of people to become 9 geriatricians. You're then ending up with geriatric 10 patients under adult medicine sub-specialties and, even worse, in the surgical sub-specialties as outliers, and 11 that just amplifies the whole problem. 12 13 14 Up to this moment, there is no - there doesn't appear to be any appetite for any of the colleges to change that 15 16 fundamental structure. 17 18 I think one of the other things for regional areas in 19 terms of training is we - I've been in this job here for 20 20 years and I have never been able to convince the 21 colleges that Illawarra Shoalhaven could complete three 22 years of specialist training for advanced trainees. 23 24 So what that means is we're allowed to do two years but not the third year, the final year. So you've got 25 26 advanced trainees who are very keen to be geriatricians, 27 who graduate, postgraduate now as opposed to 28 undergraduates, so by the time they're in specialist 29 training they are significantly older with family 30 commitments and mortgages. They finish their time in the Illawarra Shoalhaven, they're not allowed to do their third 31 32 year and have to go to Sydney, which is completely 33 disruptive, and often if you finish your final year in 34 Sydney, you will end up working in Sydney. 35 36 I feel as if there is an unfairness there, that we're 37 still very city-centric and yet the population is not following that demographic. So the elderly population is 38 coming out to the regions and rural, and yet we're not 39 40 allowing the training to follow them, which I think is 41 a significant contributor. 42 43 DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Hawkins, you wanted to add something, 44 and I'm going to go on to you also about the effects on bed 45 flows, et cetera, but can you just comment there? 46 The only thing I was going to comment in 47 MS HAWKINS:

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1 regards to causes is I feel that we're at the tail end of 2 a much broader issue. Obviously what we're seeing now is 3 the current state of bed block due to, in part, our 4 NDIS-waiting clients and also our RACF-pathway patients. 5 What we're looking at, and what I've seen as a part of my aged care nav and discharge planning experience is we've 6 got patients who, they're - they've got no other choice but 7 8 nursing home placement.

10 Oftentimes they come to hospital at a point of crisis, and that's usually as a result of carer fatigue or carer 11 12 stress. There is a frequency of patients that come through the department as a result of social admissions, where 13 14 their carer is no longer able to provide that level of care that they require to be safe at home, whether that be in 15 16 their own home environment, supported by a carer, or 17 supported by services.

I do think that in regards to patients, there is a high demand of community resources in terms of care planning. What we do see in hospital is there are delays in terms of families being able to access ACAT or RAS assessments, which then leads them to not being able to get access to the services that they require to remain safe at home.

27 There is an issue with families' ability to navigate 28 the My Aged Care system, and to safely and efficiently get 29 the service approvals for their loved one that they need. but also to have that service onset. There are delays in 30 31 terms of home care package approvals, there are significant 32 delays in terms of waiting for a 3/4, for example. That 33 could be anywhere from six to 12 months, not to then 34 mention the time of ACAT assessment to wait for that approval, which then leads families to make, I guess, 35 36 a risk assessment in terms of, "Are we able to manage at the level of care that we are", which is more frequently on 37 the responsibility of family. 38

40 When they reach that point of crisis, they then 41 present to the emergency department and then, as they're admitted by a geriatrician or if they are a medical 42 43 outlier, they require significant discharge planning in 44 hospital, which increases their risk of a long length of 45 stay and a complex admission, which then means that their 46 only choice realistically is nursing home placement, because we're not able to get the services that they 47

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1 require to discharge effectively home. 2 3 You referred to a 3/4 taking six to DR WATERHOUSE: 4 12 months, can you explain what a 3/4 is? 5 What I'm talking about is the level of the 6 MS HAWKINS: 7 Home care packages come in four levels, home care package. 8 so there's a level 1, 2, 3 and 4. So you're looking at 9 a level 1/2, which is a little bit of help at home, to 10 a level 3/4, which is more the moderate to maximal level of service provided in the community to a patient. 11 That also 12 equates to hours and it also equates to the funding that 13 supports that package. 14 15 DR WATERHOUSE: Is there a perception at least that it 16 will be easier to traverse that process and get someone 17 care even if they do go home, if they bring the person to hospital and there's sort of help to be able to facilitate 18 19 the process? Is that what people believe? Is that why 20 they present? 21 22 MS HAWKINS: Correct. I think that that would be an I think that it is sometimes easier 23 accurate statement. for families and patients to rely on the discharge planning 24 service and the multidisciplinary service that is provided 25 by a hospital to be able to quickly and effectively 26 27 coordinate that care to give them a resolution, to be able 28 to say, "Yes, we can find you a service package", or "We 29 can offer you an interim package", which is either an !TAX or a ComPacks package, over them having to coordinate that 30 31 themselves at home. 32 33 DR WATERHOUSE: I'm mindful that I want to hear from 34 others as well, obviously, but I wanted to clarify two 35 things. You referred a moment ago to a "social admission". 36 Can you just explain what you mean by that? 37 Typically how I define a social 38 MS HAWKINS: Correct. admission is that a patient has come in not for a medical 39 40 reason, it's more often because family are not able to cope 41 with the level of care. What we would reference that to and what we're seeing typically is in regards to behaviours 42 43 of concern, so wandering and exit-seeking from their home, 44 or that the level of care in terms of ADL, which is 45 activities of daily living, which means their personal care 46 or their medication management or just an overlying level of supervision is required, which means that they need to 47

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1 come into hospital because their family are not able to 2 cope with that level, and more often than not, it's as 3 a result of falls as well. 4 5 DR WATERHOUSE: You also said that you previously had been 6 an aged care nurse navigator and a discharge planner. 7 8 MS HAWKINS: Correct. 9 10 DR WATERHOUSE: Can you explain in very brief terms what those roles involved? 11 12 13 MS HAWKINS: A discharge planner, as a discharge planner 14 you are responsible for assessing patients, typically adults, so over the age of 18, that are admitted either to 15 16 a surgical or medical ward in regards to service planning. 17 So that's coordination of care, making sure that a patient 18 has an appropriate discharge location. And within an aged 19 care navigator, it's similar, but it also has a patient 20 flow aspect of making sure that patients are going to the 21 right hospital for the right care needs and that their care 22 journey is monitored, but they are under the care of a geriatrician, so they're admitted under geriatrics. 23 24 25 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. 26 27 Ms Pickering, do you have aged care navigators and 28 discharge planners working in the district? 29 30 MS PICKERING: We do. We have - we call them the 31 supported transitioning care team, so they're our discharge 32 planners, so similar to Rachael was describing but probably 33 not just our medical and surgical, they'll go into older 34 people's wards as well, but certainly more the adult population, to - I guess what they will look at is trying 35 36 to identify whether they're already known to some of our health community service providers, and, if so, then 37 communicate with those providers to see if there's anything 38 we can do to support transfer back home. But again, if 39 40 they are not linked, then they will look at what care needs 41 they may have on discharge to try and work with the ward teams to support that transition back to the home. 42 43 44 DR WATERHOUSE: Okay. Mr Wakeling, I would just like to 45 ask you, how does bed block in one facility in, say, one of 46 your smaller facilities there in Illawarra, how does that have a back-flow effect and can you talk us through what 47

1 that is? 2 3 MR WAKELING: Yes. Thank you for the question, 4 Dr Waterhouse. I usually look at the access and flow of a 5 system from the back of the system more towards the 6 emergency department. I think, first of all, the aged care 7 patients, they're in their beds, they're maintenance beds, it's not the optimal environment that they should be 8 9 because it should be their home that they're living in and 10 enjoying the last days that they have. It's very much a hospital environment. I'll start with that. 11 12 13 When the patients are in the hospital environment for 14 those long periods of time, they've got an increased risk of hospital-acquired complications by the nature of their 15 16 complex condition, the facility they're in and the long 17 length of stay because they can't get out. They've got a risk of deconditioning. 18 They've got an increased risk of 19 mortality as well. So that compounds that bed block, what 20 we're talking about, in that maintenance type phase. And 21 then --22 DR WATERHOUSE: Are there back-flow effects into the ED 23 24 and ambulances? 25 Yes. So the phase before the maintenance 26 MR WAKELING: 27 bed is usually from a sub-acute phase, so a rehab or a GEM, 28 a geriatric evaluation and management bed, and so those 29 beds, where we provide basically rehab care to try and get a patient's goals that they've identified back to a safe 30 31 enough discharge or an outcome that the multidisciplinary 32 team, patient and family have agreed, they get full of the 33 maintenance type patients that are waiting NDIS or aged 34 care. 35 36 So that blocks our ability to move a patient from the 37 acute phase to the sub-acute phase. So there's a proportion of patients, as we described at the start, 38 currently on Monday at Wollongong there were 25 patients 39 40 awaiting a residential aged care in our acute beds. That 41 inhibits our ability to provide acute care, so the patients 42 that need acute care, back-flow back into the emergency 43 department. 44 45 At Wollongong, for example, at any given day, there's 46 around 30 admissions in the emergency department. Rachae1 mentioned that there are five geriatric patients today 47

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1 under Professor Potter's team's care in the emergency 2 department. I've just had a quick look, four are over 3 12 hours, there's one over 24 hours. The risk of 4 hospital-acquired complication or extended length of stay 5 goes up dramatically for those patients who are in the emergency department for that length of time, and 6 7 ultimately, it's sad, but their mortality risk is 8 increasing and their percentage of or their likelihood of 9 not meeting their goals of care to be discharged home in 10 the sub-acute phase goes down and they're more than likely 11 going to go to a residential aged care facility. 12 13 DR WATERHOUSE: I want to come back to the effects on 14 patients in a little while, but just so I understand it, in terms of the back-flow, so you've got patients that are in 15 16 a sub-acute facility waiting to go to a nursing home, they 17 can't be moved out, therefore the patients who no longer 18 need acute care can't go into the sub-acute facility, 19 therefore, the patients who are waiting in the emergency 20 department can't go into the acute care beds and therefore, 21 you get things like ambulance ramping. Is that basically 22 a correct summary of what you're explaining there? 23 That's an exact summary, yeah. And then, to 24 MR WAKELING: extend on that, we can't offload the ambulances if they 25 require a bed - we try and provide the ambulances to the 26 27 most safest place that patient can receive care. And then, 28 increasingly, on my observation as an emergency nurse for 29 the last 15 years, there's a tendency to provide care in the waiting room, which may not be optimal for all patients 30 31 and may be unsafe in certain circumstances. 32 DR WATERHOUSE: 33 Is there also an issue in terms of being able to, say, move intensive care unit patients out to 34 35 a step-down ward when they no longer need intensive care 36 because there is blockage in the acute beds? 37 MR WAKELING: That's correct. 38 39 40 DR WATERHOUSE: And are there cancellations of surgical 41 cases because there is no ICU or no ward bed that they can 42 go to postoperatively? 43 44 MR WAKELING: That's correct. So the other two scenarios, 45 as you described, are once the patients have finished their 46 ICU or HDU - intensive care or high-dependency unit - level of care that required, you know, higher nursing, allied 47

1 health and medical health requirements, there may not be an 2 acute bed for them to step down into, so therefore they 3 stay in that ICU/HDU bed, blocking access, where there 4 might be a patient in the emergency department's 5 resuscitation room that is on a ventilator or a breathing machine, they might be delayed moving up, but also that's 6 in a very expensive bed type, ICU and HDU, to cost because 7 8 of the higher labour costs, so the patient is not right in 9 there, from a financial perspective. 10 If we don't have beds for a patient after their 11 theatre to decant to, they'll either stay in recovery 12 longer, therefore we might extend recovery opening hours -13 14 that will require overtime, there is an impact on burnout, wellbeing and fatigue - and/or like you said, if we know 15

there's a crisis, and we measure that operational assessment every day in our short-term escalation plans, if we are in step black, our level four highest escalation, we might make a decision where operations for certain patients are cancelled because there's no safe space for them to go postoperatively.

DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. I want to just move to see if that's very similar, or is at all similar, in the Central Coast Local Health District. Is what Mr Wakeling is describing what you see day to day?

28 MS PICKERING: Yes, it is. It is very similar. The only 29 thing I would add to that is that it can also then result in us opening surge beds, as Amy mentioned before, which 30 then sees us stretch our resources across the broader bed 31 32 base, which then, from a nursing perspective has, for us on 33 the Central Coast, been quite challenging to meet our 34 minimum staffing requirements across many wards.

36 DR WATERHOUSE: When you say "minimum staffing 37 requirements", you're talking there about nursing hours 38 per --39

40 MS PICKERING: I am. Nursing hours per patient day, yes.

DR WATERHOUSE: But I'm assuming that there is no change well, there's no change, we've heard already, to the allied health staffing; they are spread more thinly?

46 MS PICKERING: No, that's right.

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1 DR WATERHOUSE: What about the medical staffing? 2 MS PICKERING: Very similar; as like allied health, spread 3 4 thinly. 5 DR WATERHOUSE: 6 Do you take on locums and things to try to 7 manage the load or do you try to do it with overtime and so 8 on? 9 10 MS PICKERING: I'm probably not the best one to answer 11 that one. 12 13 MS OKULICZ: I've only ever known locums to cover 14 a specialist or VMO's leave, not as an additional team. We 15 still only have a set number of teams. 16 17 There has been commentary from some doctors that when 18 they are on take, that they've got 40 to 50 patients just 19 for one team, so three doctors for 40 to 50 patients spread 20 across the site that they're trying to equally see. So 21 then you've got the added challenges of when you're trying 22 to contact said team for a discharge summary or a discharge plan, they're on the other side of the hospital dealing 23 24 with an acute sick person and they can't get to where they 25 need to be or where we need them to be to progress 26 a discharge. 27 28 Just in terms of sub-acute hospitals, like the 29 Illawarra, we've only got one sub-acute hospital on the 30 Central Coast, so there's two acute and one sub-acute, and 31 that's at Woy Woy. Patients from Wyong don't go to 32 Woy Woy, they would sit in Wyong because, one, it is too 33 far and lots of families don't want to go down there, but 34 also that is primarily a Gosford discharge site for 35 sub-acute. 36 37 There was a sub-acute hospital at Long Jetty, but it was closed I think in 2020 or 2021, and that is now where 38 the urgent care centre is, but basically all the sub-acute 39 40 patients now sit within Wyong because there's nowhere else 41 for them to transfer to. 42 43 DR WATERHOUSE: Do you have the same issues in terms of 44 being able to move patients out of intensive care and have 45 surgical cases cancelled? 46 MS PICKERING: 47 Yes.

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1 2 MS OKULICZ: We try very hard not to cancel surgical Yes. patients but unfortunately sometimes if the hospital is at 3 4 capacity there is no other choice. 5 What about flow within the ward, how many 6 DR WATERHOUSE: 7 patients do - like, you're staffed for how many? 8 9 MS OKULICZ: I'm funded for 22 beds, but my average bed 10 base since January has been 27 patients a day, and it can go up to 30, because I have 30 physical beds within my unit 11 12 but only 22 of them are funded. So then my roster is only 13 funded for those 22 beds and whatever nursing hours per 14 patient day that looks like. 15 16 If I'm running at 30 beds a day, that's an extra six 17 staff that I need to find across each shift, and so if 18 we're running at 30 beds every day for - and I have done it 19 for a month - that's a significant increase in work flow. 20 I'm running, on average, anywhere between 350 to 450 hours 21 of overtime a fortnight. 22 23 DR WATERHOUSE: And it's being done by staff that are 24 already on your ward or by other --25 MS OKULICZ: 26 Majority of the overtime is done by staff on my ward. The casual pool and nursing support roster do the 27 28 best that they can to fill in some of my gaps as well, but 29 their main focus is to fill any unplanned leave, so if anyone calls in sick, then that is what they cover. 30 Ιf 31 there's any surge or overtime required, then that's up to 32 myself. 33 34 DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Hawkins, I just want to ask you a question in relation to I think you opened an extended 35 36 ward specifically because of these bed numbers; is that 37 correct? 38 MS HAWKINS: 39 Correct, yes. 40 41 DR WATERHOUSE: And can you explain in terms of the staffing of that ward how does that function? 42 43 44 C7 east aged care we opened on 26 June 2024. MS HAWKINS: 45 We are an 18-bed ward but currently this morning we had 46 16 patients. We have a staff profile of three patients -47 three staff on a morning, four on an afternoon and three on

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1 a night. What further detail do you need? 2 3 DR WATERHOUSE: Just, I suppose, understanding what your 4 standard staffing is and how you get additional staff and 5 whether it's purely a nursing staff thing, do you get extra allied health, et cetera? 6 7 8 MS HAWKINS: We do have allied health that are allocated, 9 but they are not permanent, they are shared between other 10 wards. As a surge ward, we created a roster, when we opened and we were allocated staff, but our roster is made 11 12 up of PRPs, which is permanent relief pool staff, agency and casual pool staff as well. We are very fortunate that 13 14 we do have some casual pool staff members that do take regular shifts with us, but our staffing can be variable. 15 16 17 DR WATERHOUSE: When you say that it's a surge ward, has 18 it just been opened for a limited period of time or is it indefinite or how does it work? 19 20 21 MS HAWKINS: So my current understanding, and Jan will 22 probably be able to comment further, at the moment, it is 23 a surge, temporary ward. We close on 22 December with 24 a view that we are going to re-open in the new year, but 25 for how long that is going to be, I am unsure. 26 27 DR WATERHOUSE: Okay. Mr Wakeling I think you wanted to 28 make a comment and then if we go to Professor Potter. 29 MR WAKELING: Thank you, Dr Waterhouse. 30 Following the 31 surge comments at Wollongong hospital - thanks, Mel, for 32 raising that from the Central Coast's perspective -33 Wollongong currently has 34 over-census beds opened. 34 Normally what we would do in demand management is flex up and flex down. As Rachael and the rest said, they're 35 36 unbudgeted, unfunded, unstaffed, it's usually through 37 overtime, agency, et cetera. 38 You may have heard earlier that Professor Potter 39 40 referred to B3 east aged care ward having 21 beds, but 41 Rachael mentioned that they were 24/25 beds, that's because Professor Potter is responding to the funded/budgeted 42 43 allocation of 21, but for the last two years, my 44 understanding is Wollongong Hospital has operated and rostered to the 25 beds because we know that the demand is 45 46 there. 47

Wollongong Hospital's over-census beds, since
I restarted back in the district in April 2024, have been
opened no lower than 34 over-census beds at any one time
and we only safely have 35 over-census beds. So we are
operating at capacity the whole time.

C7 east was a response to winter, because it was hard.
I do not foresee Wollongong Hospital safely closing C7 east
without having a dramatic back-flow impact, as we discussed
before, on increasing the admissions in the emergency
department, and that will have an effect on us to provide
high quality and safe emergency department care and offload
those ambulances. Thank you.

- DR WATERHOUSE: I think you just mentioned the word "winter", so there is obviously a seasonal aspect to this, but by the same token, 22 December is a little after winter, so are you seeing a difference? It used to be more of a seasonal issue and it is now all year long, is that what you are saying?
- 22 MR WAKELING: From a seasonality, from a demand 23 perspective, as Professor Potter mentioned, the Illawarra's 24 demographic and Shoalhaven's demographic is increasingly 25 old. It's growing at a rate above the New South Wales 26 state average from a demand perspective.

From a seasonal perspective, it's not so much the demand changes, it's the acuity of the patients, therefore, they need more inputs and the length of stay is longer to get them to a safer place for discharge. That's my comment around seasonality.

34 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you.

Professor Potter, you wanted to add something?

PROFESSOR POTTER: 38 Yes, I think just to emphasise, so the B3 east, which is the geriatric unit, is funded for 21, is 39 40 never below 24. C7 east is the temporary surge ward. That 41 ward is funded for renovation for a completely different patient group, and because despite 24 beds being used for 42 43 acute geriatric, we are never less than 60 acute geriatric 44 patients in Wollongong Hospital, and because of the 45 difficulties and the strain on junior staff and senior 46 staff going into 13 or 14 wards to see these patients, we temporarily put them in C7 east and that gave us 40 of our 47

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1 60 all in one place, which helped to some extent. However, 2 as everybody has said, we're not going to be able to 3 continue that ward beyond December, and my understanding is 4 that although it will re-open probably in early February, 5 it will not be for geriatric medicine, it will be for the purpose that ministry funded the renovations, so we'll be 6 back to a situation with at least 46 outliers in acute 7 8 geriatric medicine.

- 10 DR WATERHOUSE: Those in the room, does anyone want to 11 comment on that seasonal aspect, winter and the growing 12 numbers, et cetera?
- 14 MS OKULICZ: Previously we would see a seasonal - like, winter was always our busiest period and then it would calm 15 16 down in the August/September, and then summer was generally 17 okay, but we've seen a shift, especially from Christmas I would go down to about 18 beds across the holiday 18 2023. We only dropped to 18 beds for two days and then 19 period. 20 by 27 December, I was back up to 27 patients.
- January was probably one of the worst Januarys I have ever seen in terms of patient requirements and admissions, and it hasn't stopped pretty much all year. That's why my average bed base is now 27, because we've literally been consistently at 30 or more, or 25 or more patients every week, with occasional drops back down to 22, but it would only last a day or two and it will spike back up.
- 30 But winter was definitely worse on top of that, so we 31 were already seeing an increase in presentations, an 32 increase in how unwell patients were, and also they're 33 staying at home longer, they're coming in with far more 34 comorbidities, requiring far more treatment and input, so 35 they're staying in hospital longer.

37 And then on top of that we got winter, which saw an increase, and then COVID outbreaks and all the impacts of 38 that as well was still ongoing. And then we actually had 39 40 to open a surge ward temporarily, which was only supposed 41 to be eight patients but was consistently running at 12, and that was purely staffed by casual pool and nursing 42 support, which then left the lack of resources for the rest 43 44 of the hospital because they were the priority staffed from 45 casual pool and nursing support.

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Yes, so seasonally we still had a bad winter but it

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1 didn't stop from summer. It's just been consistently 2 higher. We've had an increasing growth in the area, they 3 keep building more homes. We're having more people move to 4 the area coming from Sydney. Our ageing population is 5 still significant. At one point, I think I had 30 patients and 45 per cent of them were over the age of 90; I had two 6 7 over the age of 100. So they're definitely - like, they're 8 there and they're older and they're staying at home longer 9 and they're refusing to get the help that they need because 10 they want to be at home. So it's just a compounding effect. But, yes, this year has been probably one of the 11 worst years I've seen in terms of health in Wyong Hospital. 12 13 14 DR WATERHOUSE: And Mr Shortis, are there flow-on effects 15 seasonally from your perspective to community health? 16 17 MR SHORTIS: Yes, we have increased demand over winter but 18 we have a significant demand most of the year for our 19 services. What we found over the last couple of years is 20 the winter period has been growing out longer and longer, 21 and instead of starting in May, we are now kind of planning 22 in February for winter to start in early April. 23 24 DR WATERHOUSE: I'm going to come back, as I said, to the effects on patients, the effects on staff and some of the 25 26 solutions and opportunities, or options, but did anyone 27 else have anything that they would like to say specifically 28 about bed flows? That might be a good time to take 29 a break. 30 THE COMMISSIONER: 31 We might take an adjournment until 32 11.50. To those of you online, I might just leave it with 33 icourts, but we will be back at 11.50. Thank you. We'll 34 adjourn until then. 35 SHORT ADJOURNMENT. 36 37 THE COMMISSIONER: 38 Yes. 39 40 DR WATERHOUSE: Before the break I mentioned that I'd like 41 to move on to some things about the consequences and risks 42 for patients. 43 44 If I can start with you, Mr Wakeling, because 45 I understand that you still work as a registered nurse 46 sometimes in the emergency department; is that right? 47

1 MR WAKELING: That's correct.

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3 DR WATERHOUSE: Can you tell me, from your perspective, 4 what issues do you see? You have touched on these a little 5 bit before, but what issues do you see, particularly in 6 that setting, with geriatric patients coming in and being 7 in the emergency department for long periods?

9 MR WAKELING: So as I said before, the length of stay of 10 these patients has a detrimental impact to the outcomes of 11 these patients, but these patients need - a higher 12 likelihood of needing a bed to start the assessment. So 13 not having a bed makes it very difficult, and it could lead 14 to a situation where you're unable to offer the ambulance to a safe place, therefore, the ambulance delay is not just 15 16 within the KPI, which is 30 minutes, but up to hours.

I think it starts with, you know, some of the risks of complications of these aged care patients on the ambulance stretcher, which might result in pressure injuries, because the stretchers are designed to be hard; if there's a CPR required, et cetera; the bright lights in regards to risks of delirium, it's just an unsafe environment.

25 Certainly care does begin while they're on those 26 stretchers, et cetera, but sometimes the care that you're 27 trying to provide, ie, it might be a blood test, 28 a cannulation, to give intravenous fluids, it might not be 29 in the correct setting or location that's safe for the 30 patient or safe for the staff member.

So in a corridor, that's not a good environment. If it's in a chair, for example, before a bed becomes available, there's a whole range of - you know, that's not best practice in regards to cannulation, the bending-over movement, there's some occupational health and risk behaviours for the staff member.

I think they're the main risks. And then, from 39 a privacy perspective, these patients, the environment 40 41 we've put them in, it might not be the most dignified location for an assessment that you're making. If it's 42 43 a heart test, you need to remove the clothes and expose the 44 body to get access to stickers and labels, so the impact of 45 not having a bed there, because of the downstream impact we 46 spoke to before, you might not be able to do a heart test for the patient if they're in a corridor, a busy corridor 47

1 there, because of a privacy perspective, and other tasks 2 that require access to the private areas of a patient. 3 Thank you. 4 5 DR WATERHOUSE: Do they tend to need more supervision in the emergency department environment and it's supervision 6 7 that can't necessarily be given by the staff available? 8 9 MR WAKELING: That's correct. So especially if the 10 patient's in the waiting room while we wait for an acute Currently, the emergency departments attempt ratios 11 bed. of one to three, if it's an acute bed, for a nurse, or one 12 to one in a resuscitation bed, if that's the case. 13 14 15 There are no ratios that occur in the waiting room. 16 It fills up and your ratio might go to one to 20, and that 17 certainly was the case in my last ED shift on Wednesday, 18 where the waiting room was quite full, and there's no way 19 a nurse can safely monitor, assess, treat or provide 20 medications or things that the medical officer has ordered 21 for 20 patients, let alone aged care patients. 22 23 DR WATERHOUSE: And to your point about privacy, is part of the issue that hearing deteriorates with age and 24 therefore you might have to speak quite loudly to be asking 25 some quite sort of intrusive questions in a very loud voice 26 27 to be understood by the patient? 28 29 MR WAKELING: That's a good point and I would agree with Alongside the other senses, if they've got 30 that point. 31 osteoarthritis or other comorbidities that they are likely 32 to have, a chair or a hard chair or a position might not be 33 comfortable for that patient. Certainly Professor Potter and Rachael would be able to expand, but pain is a stimuli 34 35 that triggers things like a delirium, et cetera, and vision 36 might be impaired so they might be in a busy room with other patients or a location of chairs that might not be 37 I think that's a great point. 38 safe. 39 40 DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Hawkins, can I just turn to you. What 41 are the risks in the ward environment for these sorts of patients who either can't be - they may not need acute care 42 43 but they are sort of there for extended periods? 44 45 MS HAWKINS: So I guess acute conditions, obviously, 46 compound generalised frailty of our aged care patients, but I think that - are we relating this to in terms of nursing 47

1 home patients' inability to step down to a peripheral site 2 or to their nursing home? Is that what we're asking? 3 4 DR WATERHOUSE: That's right, yes. 5 I guess the impacts on patients are that 6 MS HAWKINS: they, in our ward, require a high level of supervision, and 7 8 that's because with generalised frailty they're often 9 requiring assistance with tasks, whether that be 10 generalised showering, medication management. I think that the compounded issues are deconditioning and physical 11 decline, as well as a risk of delirium or acute confusion. 12 13 14 I guess the other issues are isolation, because 15 they're not in their home environment, and ability 16 for family to visit regularly, as well as risk of 17 hospital-acquired infections and then obviously that delay in their length of stay as a result of the care needs that 18 19 would result in that. 20 21 DR WATERHOUSE: What sorts of infections are you referring 22 to there? 23 More often in terms of COVID or -24 MS HAWKINS: 25 predominantly, it would be COVID. 26 27 DR WATERHOUSE: And what about falls? Is that a risk that 28 occurs in the ward? 29 So obviously patients, because they MS HAWKINS: Correct. 30 31 are not in their own environment, there is a level of 32 supervision that's required. Due to the nature of our 33 ward, we do have two-bedded rooms and single rooms, but we 34 risk-manage our patients when they come up to us as to 35 where we place them, but they are - falls is an issue, yes. 36 37 DR WATERHOUSE: Before I go to those in the room, Professor Potter, did you want to make any comment in 38 relation to the effect on patients? 39 40 41 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, look, there's very, very clear literature around frail elderly who often all of their 42 43 senses are not working to the extent that a younger fitter 44 person would be, so that's vision, hearing, cognition, 45 continence, speech. So in the emergency department, if you 46 are there for a prolonged period of time, it can often even lead to completely inappropriate interventions. 47 So if

a patient who might, if you had been able to get an 1 2 environment that you could have a sensitive conversation 3 with them about whether they wished, you know, invasive 4 tests, whether they wished comfort care, whether they 5 wished to be palliated at home, if you simply can't have those conversations because of the environment, they end up 6 7 on a conveyor belt going through all sorts of things that 8 they wouldn't otherwise have gone through. They might not 9 be able to indicate that they need the toilet, they might 10 not know that they need the toilet, whereas in their own environment, they were able to recognise these things, but 11 12 there are so many external stimuli going on. 13

14 The literature is really clear: the longer you are in an inappropriate high-activity area as a frail elderly 15 16 person, the higher your morbidity is in terms of 17 infections, falls, pressure areas, but also the higher your So if you stay in an emergency department as 18 mortality is. a frail elderly person for 12 hours, you're much more 19 20 likely to die in the next week than if you didn't. So it's 21 really quite stark. It's distressing.

23 As a geriatrician, that distresses me for the frail 24 elderly people, but I've also been in the emergency department where younger people are distressed by frail 25 26 elderly people calling out all the time. You know, if 27 you're there with an acute MI, somebody yelling at you all 28 the time is incredibly distressing, and it's incredibly 29 distressing for the staff, who are trying their best to do the best by everyone and yet, you know, attacked on all 30 31 fronts.

33 So I think as this problem gets bigger, it certainly 34 has enormous impact for patients, staff and other patients 35 in the emergency department.

Then as Rachael said for the few, you know, the small 37 percentage of our acute geries - patients that we get to an 38 acute geries ward - there are still challenges there, but 39 40 you have to remember the vast majority are scattered throughout the hospital. They're in every ward apart from 41 42 paediatrics and obstetrics. Every other ward has two or three frail demented elderly people, where the staff have 43 44 no - and I don't mean this critically, their expertise is in surgery or cardiology, they have no knowledge or comfort 45 46 in dealing with this patient group, and as a result, the 47 outcomes are much worse.

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2 We know this. We have analysed this. We have looked The outcomes for our outlier patients are far 3 at this. 4 worse than for the patients in our own wards. It's not just the patients and the relatives: it's the other patients in the ward who are distressed by this, the number of complaints we get about, "Why was there a demented person in the surgical ward? My surgical father was very distressed by this, there were people intruding" - and for the staff.

So I think at every level of the hospital, it just 12 creates such additional stress, such additional burnout, 13 14 and certainly I'm sure Ben will testify to this, we have lost - since COVID and since the numbers going up because 15 16 of aged care facilities closing, we have lost so many staff 17 who were elderly - well, not elderly, they were approaching 18 retirement age but had no intention of retiring, but so 19 many of them --

21 DR WATERHOUSE: Sorry, I want to come back to staff if 22 I may, because I know that the people in the room are keen 23 to be able to tell their experience as well. So just 24 talking specifically about the patients and the effect on 25 patients, can you tell me from your point of view, 26 Ms Okulicz, what do you see as being the risks in the ward 27 to patients?

29 MS OKULICZ: Well, especially if they have come in with acute delirium, they're at significant high risk of falls, 30 31 they're very impulsive, they can't follow instructions. 32 A lot of these patients, we then attempt to manage in 33 what's called a Hi-Lo bed, so a bed that goes right down to 34 the ground so then the patient can't get up, so if they're 35 not supervised, they can't get up.

37 The issue being around that is that then if we're having a long time to review, get on top of their delirium 38 or their confusion or work out a plan for them, they spend 39 40 a lot of time in that bed, so then they become 41 deconditioned and then they've lost their ability to walk as they did previously. So we've had people come in 42 43 walking and then unable to walk again because they 44 decondition quite quickly, and it's very hard then to get 45 those people reconditioned, because if the delirium 46 resolves and their confusion is ongoing, they can't follow instructions, they're not rehab-able, and then, therefore, 47

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they end up in a nursing home because of basically what
we've done to them in terms of trying to keep them safe
from falls, they've now had this complication that they can
no longer walk.

6 You've also then got patients that are spending 7 extended periods of time in bed who are at high risk of 8 pressure injuries, we try to do their personal care and 9 keep them moving as much as possible, but then you've also 10 got complications of hospital-acquired pneumonias if 11 they're staying in for a long time as well, because they're 12 not up moving around.

14 You've got increased behaviours because you don't have 15 any diversional therapy. They're just bored. They're 16 sitting looking at four walls all day with no source of 17 stimulation or activity, so therefore, they go into other people's bed spaces, you're trying to redirect them, you've 18 19 got no capacity of trying to provide that, and then if 20 you've got someone that's in hospital for four months, they 21 haven't been out in the sun, they haven't been out in fresh 22 air, they've got that sort of impact on them as well. So they're very - they end up depressed, they've got all sorts 23 24 of complications from being stuck in.

26 DR WATERHOUSE: In terms of the deconditioning, are you 27 talking there about loss of muscle mass and so on?

29 MS OKULICZ: Yes.

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31 DR WATERHOUSE: Is that partly a function of the 32 limitations in terms of allied health staff relative to 33 your surge beds and so on?

Potentially as well, it is. 35 MS OKULICZ: Like, sometimes 36 if you are waiting for somebody to do that, but if somebody is in acute delirium, a physiotherapist isn't going to be 37 able to get them up, it is not safe for the patient, it's 38 not safe for the staff, they can't follow instructions, 39 40 they could be combative. So starting physiotherapy at that 41 point isn't ideal for anybody.

DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Pickering, can you tell me about the
consequences and risks that you see across the district
more broadly for these types of people?

47 MS PICKERING: I think probably most things have been

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1 covered, to be honest. I guess the result of all the 2 things that have been mentioned so far is that increased 3 length of stay and I guess then the challenges, 4 particularly for those older people that have become 5 deconditioned, the challenges of then finding the services that can support them if they are at a point when they can 6 go home, because they are - I guess, as was mentioned 7 8 before, they may have been walking when they came in but 9 then they have some limitations on their mobility and aids 10 and things are required. So then it becomes a challenge trying to match those services in the community that can 11 12 actually meet their care needs if they're not at the point 13 for a residential aged care facility

- DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Shortis, by the time they get to community health, what do you sort of see about these people who have been for prolonged periods in hospital without any acute care?
- 20 MR SHORTIS: As has been discussed, we see clients that 21 are deconditioned, they don't have the mobility that they 22 used to, requiring increased allied health services in the 23 community to try and maintain that. We also often see 24 other complications of being in hospital, like pressure 25 areas that require care and as Melissa just mentioned, difficulties in navigating their increased care needs and 26 finding the providers to actually provide that care. 27 There are significant waiting lists, if you are on a level 3 or 4 28 package, to get funding to get the assistance with your 29 gardening, your cleaning, your nursing care, your allied 30 31 health care.
- 33 DR WATERHOUSE: Would it be fair to say that if they had, 34 perhaps, been discharged sooner, if that had been an 35 option, then it may be easier to find carers for them in 36 the community that have got the skills required?
- MR SHORTIS: Potentially because they'd more likely be
   less deconditioned and more mobile and more able to resume
   their previous care-at-home levels prior to admission.
- DR WATERHOUSE: Professor Potter, can I ask in terms of the outliers that you mentioned, just talking about the effect on those patients, can you give us some examples of the sorts of outcomes you have concerns about for those when I say "outliers", I'm talking about patients that are in non-geriatric wards.

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2 PROFESSOR POTTER: Can I check, can you hear me all right?

4 DR WATERHOUSE: Yes.

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PROFESSOR POTTER: Look, they have a higher incidence of 6 being sedated inappropriately. So where there are all 7 8 sorts of behavioural strategies and specific geriatric medicine guidelines over how to safely treat dangerous 9 10 behaviours or behavioural disturbance, that doesn't happen in wards where the staff are not familiar with this patient 11 12 So, for example, the sorts of doses of a calming group. 13 agent you may give to somebody who is a young person 14 experiencing perhaps a psychosis or an alcohol or drug withdrawal, it would be about a 10th to a 20th of the dose 15 16 that you would use in a frail elderly person, and we have 17 had numerous episodes and complaints and processes and, you know, committees that we have had to form to review these 18 19 things, because it's not a fault, it's not complacency 20 amongst the staff; it's a simple fear and lack of 21 understanding of how to treat this patient group.

23 That happens far more in the peripheral units. Each 24 time an inappropriate sedation happens, you're more likely 25 to have a fall, you're more likely to have a pressure area, 26 you're more likely to miss a treatable medical problem. 27 So, for example, a geriatric patient might display 28 aggressive behaviour because they are in severe pain, they 29 might be having a coronary event, whereas if you just run in and sedate them, you're not addressing any of the 30 31 underlying problems, and that happens far, far more in the 32 outlying wards, and that's despite attempts at education, 33 consulting, and it's not a criticism of the staff in the 34 outlying wards, it's an inevitability.

36 DR WATERHOUSE: Understood. I mean, they have their own 37 expertise, obviously, the patients they're used to dealing 38 with. Do you see more medication errors for the patients 39 that are on the outlier wards?

41 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes.

43 DR WATERHOUSE: Can you elaborate?

45 PROFESSOR POTTER: Along the lines of what I said, we see
46 inappropriate use of PRN medication, so that's as required.
47 We see the wrong doses being given. We see them being

1 2	given far too often, when it should have been given once and then the whole team called to help.
3 4	The other thing that is very clear, and this happens
4 5	to our outliers a lot, because the ward they are in are
6	struggling to look after them safely, they request that the
7	patient - that we move them, but because there is
8	a shortage of acute geries beds, they might move them
9	somewhere else. Every time a patient moves, particularly
10	if they move hospitals, you triple the likelihood of
11	a medication prescribing error.
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13	Every time something has to be rewritten or
14	re-prescribed, you increase the likelihood that there's
15	going to be a problem. Unfortunately for this patient
16	group, they're the group that have the most ward changes,
17 18	the most hospital changes, and they're usually the group who are on the most medications, so there's an increased
19	risk at all aspects.
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21	DR WATERHOUSE: What about in terms of having those
22	multiple moves around a hospital, does that further
23	disorientate people who might have dementia already?
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25	PROFESSOR POTTER: Absolutely. Basically a dementia
26	patient will do best in a very familiar environment with
27	a very familiar routine and very familiar staff. So even
28	if they stay on the same ward, the staff changing every
29	shift creates problems. But if you move them to different
30 31	wards, they don't know where they are. They can't work out where the toilet is, they can't work out where the buzzer
32	is, and, you know, you compound that with deafness,
33	cognitive impairment, visual inability, it just - every
34	time you move, even if you move beds, it creates additional
35	stresses for the patient.
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37	DR WATERHOUSE: So, to be clear, you've got a patient who
38	is in a hospital, sort of as a safety net, effectively,
39	because there's nowhere else for them to go, but they don't
40	need acute care, but they're in a setting where they're at
41	increased risk of behavioural disturbance; is that correct?
42	If you can just say and agree with me rather than nodding
43 44	because the transcript needs to pick it up.
44 45	PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes.
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47	DR WATERHOUSE: And they are at increased risk of falls

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1 and pressure injuries and other hospital-acquired 2 complications like that? 3 4 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes. Absolutely. 5 DR WATERHOUSE: Are those outliers also at increased risk 6 of different types of infections? 7 8 9 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, they are. So if you are not 10 familiar with a person's bed, bladder and bowel routine and you are not then toileting them in the way they were being 11 toileted, they end up with more soiling incidents, more 12 constipation incidents, which leads to more urinary tract 13 14 infections, which leads to urinary retention, which then 15 leads to kidney failure. So it just goes on and on and on. 16 17 If you're not familiar with somebody's swallowing 18 capabilities and they've moved wards, the modified diet they were supposed to get is much more likely not to reach 19 20 that patient, so they will be given a different meal by 21 somebody else, they will feed themselves and are more 22 likely to aspirate and have a pneumonia. So it just 23 happens at every level. 24 25 I think the other thing that has been documented, and 26 is very sad but true, every time you move wards, you're 27 more likely to lose your dentures, you're more likely to 28 lose your hearing aids, and so all of these things just 29 compound a frail cognitively impaired person's ability to 30 cope within the environment. 31 32 DR WATERHOUSE: A lot of those things that you're talking 33 to there are about a loss of dignity, et cetera. Do vou 34 see mental health conditions like depression developing in 35 some of these elderly people who are being moved about? 36 **PROFESSOR POTTER:** 37 Absolutely. The depression - the incidence of depression in frail elderly, in the first 38 place if you take them from their home environment and have 39 40 to admit them, it goes up. But the more moves they get the 41 more disempowered they feel, the higher the depression 42 rates are. 43 44 In addition, unfortunately, frail elderly never present in a typical way and, as I said, it's very 45 46 difficult for a changing staff to actually pick up subtle differences in a person, and so not only are they more 47

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1 likely to get depressed, it's less likely to be recognised. 2 3 Now, I may have misheard you before and DR WATERHOUSE: 4 please correct me if I did. Did you say that if somebody waits for 12 hours in an emergency department, they are 5 more likely to die in the following week? Is that correct? 6 7 8 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes. There's good literature that your 9 incidence of delirium goes up the longer you're in the ED. 10 This is for patients with underlying cognitive problems. Your risk of pressure areas goes up - as Ben pointed out, 11 12 the trolleys are not designed to be pressure-relieving 13 mattresses, they're designed to allow treatments to occur. 14 The risk of falls goes up and the risk of continence episodes goes up, and all of those carry a morbidity with 15 16 it and carry a delirium risk with it, and all of those 17 things increase your mortality. 18 19 But, to be clear, they are not dying DR WATERHOUSE: 20 necessarily from the acute condition with which they may 21 have presented --22 PROFESSOR POTTER: 23 Oh, no. 24 25 DR WATERHOUSE: -- they could be dying from one of those 26 other hospital-acquired factors, if I can put it that way? 27 28 PROFESSOR POTTER: They are, and the longer they're in the 29 wrong place, the risk of hospital-acquired complications goes up and the risk of mortality goes up. 30 31 32 DR WATERHOUSE: Does anyone else want to make a comment 33 about that aspect, not specifically to the 12 hours in ED, 34 but more generally about the effect on patients that you 35 see? 36 37 Maybe if I could start with those online, Mr Wakeling or Ms Hawkins? 38 39 40 MR WAKELING: No further comments from me, thank you. 41 42 MS HAWKINS: No further from me, thank you. 43 44 DR WATERHOUSE: And from those in the room, anything else 45 on the effect on patients of these issues? 46 47 MS OKULICZ: No, I think everything has been covered.

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1 2 DR WATERHOUSE: If I could then move on to look at Okay. the impacts on staff, and I might start with you, 3 4 Can you talk us through about what you know of Mr Shortis. 5 the impacts on community health staff of these patients 6 that they're having to deal with who are very deconditioned 7 and very - perhaps have been set back through the long time 8 they've spent in hospital? 9 10 MR SHORTIS: So with the patients who are deconditioned, they'll often, as we've spoken about before, have pressure 11 12 injuries and wounds like that that the nurses are treating, 13 but to treat the deconditioning they will often need a 14 rehab program, Rehab in the Home, by some of the allied health staff. 15 16 17 Allied health is, predominantly in my district, for 18 the Kinder community funded through the federal My Aged 19 Care system, and there are significant wait lists for that. 20 So clients will be discharged. They'll have needs. They 21 might wait up to a year to get to see a physio or an OT to 22 start the rehab program to get them back up to their 23 previous mobility. The staff triage and monitor the patients as best they can and prioritise them but there are 24 25 significant waits for these clients to get the care that 26 they require. 27 28 Do you find it difficult to recruit staff DR WATERHOUSE: 29 into these sorts of positions? 30 31 MR SHORTIS: We do find it difficult to recruit staff. We 32 find that for part of the way that NSW Health manages these 33 contracts, they're actually contracts for staff. So as 34 a nurse prior to coming into community, most of the nurses 35 that I worked with were not on contract positions; they 36 were permanently employed. In community, a proportion of 37 my nurses are on contracts and a significant number of the allied health staff are on contracts. 38 What that means is 39 they come and stay with us for a while, they get the 40 skills, then they're looking for a permanent position, so 41 we end up having a bit of a turnover in staff wanting that 42 security of a permanent job, so it does affect our recruitment and retention. 43 44 45 DR WATERHOUSE: What about burnout, is that an issue 46 within your staffing? 47

Not an issue that I have noticed. We tend to 1 MR SHORTIS: 2 have quite a supportive environment and the staff are able 3 to - when they see the clients, they always provide the 4 care that is required. 5 6 DR WATERHOUSE: So when they're leaving, it's more because 7 they're looking for a permanent position and you can't 8 offer those; is that correct? 9 10 MR SHORTIS: Yes. 11 DR WATERHOUSE: And why can't you offer those permanent 12 13 positions? 14 15 MR SHORTIS: My understanding is it's a district/ministry 16 decision that as the contract is temporary, the positions 17 attached to it are temporary as well. 18 19 DR WATERHOUSE: So when you say "the contract", that's the 20 contract from the Commonwealth Government paying for the 21 service; is that correct? 22 23 MR SHORTIS: Correct, yes. 24 Ms Okulicz, can you tell me about the 25 DR WATERHOUSE: effect on the staff in your ward? You have already 26 mentioned having some fairly challenging NDIS patients in 27 28 particular, and I suppose some of the aged care ones as 29 well, and needing security, but for your nursing staff, what is the effect on them? 30 31 32 MS OKULICZ: Well, the burnout and - because they are 33 doing significant amounts of overtime. I've got some staff that are doing, like, 40 hours of overtime a fortnight 34 35 each. Then you've also got the psychological impact of 36 turning up every day knowing that there's behaviourally 37 challenged patients that have been physically violent Many punch, kick, slap, scratch. 38 towards them. I've been punched multiple times this year myself. I've got a staff 39 40 member that's off on workers comp after being punched in 41 the face by a staff member - sorry, by a patient. 42 43 DR WATERHOUSE: I think that might be a different issue, 44 if it was by a staff member. 45 She's off on workers comp at the moment 46 MS OKULICZ: No. 47 after being punched in the face and having her arm pulled.

I have another staff member that just last week had 1 2 significant scratches down their chest because of 3 a patient, and they just have to consistently go in and 4 deal with these and try to verbally deescalate where they 5 can, because these patients still need washes, they still need their pads changed, they still need their medications 6 7 given, they need their observations attended to. They just 8 still have to go in there and - they work out whether they 9 need a buddy system, whether they need two people. Some 10 patients require four staff to do their personal care, so we rely on the patient support assistants to come and 11 12 support, because you can't have four nurses in one room because then that's away from there. 13 14

So, yes, recruiting to geriatrics can be challenging 15 16 because everyone knows it's not the glamorous one and it is 17 challenging. But I've been thankful with the staff that I have got and they sort of just get in and get it done. 18 19 But the sick leave has been consistent as well because they 20 are tired, they are burnt out, and their families are 21 taking the toll as well because they're doing so much 22 overtime and that. But yes, it is a challenge.

DR WATERHOUSE: Do they express to you concerns about the fact that, "This is not nursing, this is not what I was trained to do and spent all of those years studying to do", the types of care they're having to provide?

29 MS OKULICZ: Not so much. More the issue is about being staffed appropriately. So consistently having to work 30 31 short, that's their main concern, because again, trying to 32 find six staff a day isn't always feasible, so you are 33 consistently working one to two shifts down, whether that's 34 one nurse or two nurses down. So that's their main 35 concern, is being staffed appropriately.

Then if you've got those extra challenging patients, then they require a one-on-one nurse, so then you've also got the psychological impact of having to sit with this patient by yourself and having to be prepared to call for help, because these patients are a danger to themselves and others. That's why they need the one person with them, so they've got that challenge as well.

45 If you've got one confused patient, then you only 46 get - you don't get any additional staff, if you've got to 47 provide that one to one, so that then takes nursing hours

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1 away from the rest of the patients. But if you've got two 2 or more, then you can request additional staff, if two or 3 more patients require one to one. 4 5 DR WATERHOUSE: When you're having those patient specials 6 or the one-to-one nursing, does that tend to be an 7 assistant in nursing or a more junior nurse? 8 9 MS OKULICZ: Typically, yes. Sometimes there's a clinical 10 reason that you have to put an EN or an RN with them 11 because they've got a higher skill set, but usually it 12 falls to the AIN, unfortunately, because the RNs and ENs 13 need to be freed up to do all the medication administration 14 and all the other technical stuff for the rest of the 15 patients. 16 17 DR WATERHOUSE: Obviously, it would be a terrible thing to be punched in the face by a patient, or by anyone, but by 18 19 a patient, which is the concern we're talking about now. 20 Do the staff report feeling supported by the system and by 21 the hospital generally in terms of the way that they are 22 enabled to deal with something like that or the scratches 23 or other injuries we've discussed? 24 25 MS OKULICZ: Not always. I think they feel supported by me, because I do my best to support them and they know that 26 I will go out there and get in the thick of it with them, 27 28 but I think they don't feel supported when, like, you've 29 got multiple challenging patients and then they want to admit another one, but then you don't have the staffing or 30 31 the resources to manage that as well, and so you request 32 that one to one or you request the additional staff because 33 of the increased behaviours, and you are told, "No, there's no resources. You have to take this patient. We're not 34 35 giving you any further staff to deal with it." 36 37 DR WATERHOUSE: Okay. And with the fact that you don't get additional medical staff, I'm thinking junior medical 38 staff in particular, do you find that by them being more 39 40 stretched across a larger cohort of patients, it means they 41 have less time to give on the ward helping you to manage some of these issues? 42 43 44 MS OKULICZ: Yes. So we have a system where you can 45 request a JMO consult through the computer system and 46 they're supposed to regularly check their tasks. But it could be hours before a doctor is free to come and do that 47

1 or if the medical team is rounding with all their patients, then you're paging them, going, "We've got an issue, you 2 3 need to review these medications", or "This patient has an 4 issue", it could still take a time before they come to you. 5 They try to review as best they can over the phone and give instruction if they can't get to you, but, yes, there can 6 7 be limitations on getting medical support. 8 9 DR WATERHOUSE: Before I go to those online, Ms Pickering, 10 did you want to add anything? 11 I was just going on add from a community 12 MS PICKERING: 13 perspective, with the effect on staff, we are seeing more 14 complex patients being discharged out into the community, and I guess it's a shift from probably what was five, 10 15 16 Patients that would have received a certain vears ago. type of care in the inpatient setting are now being pushed 17 18 much earlier into the community context because of the bed pressures, and we are now seeing our community staff are 19 20 needing to be trained and receive education in areas that 21 they have previously been unfamiliar with, and I guess with 22 that, it takes time. 23 24 We're also seeing, I guess, a larger number of referrals coming through, through to the community, and 25 26 what that results in is the teams having to reprioritise 27 almost on a daily basis to ensure that they have 28 a reasonable workload each day to meet the demands of the 29 patients they've got on their books, but as a result, some patients are being put off or being encouraged to 30 31 self-care, with the nurses a phone call away, which is not 32 always ideal, depending on their care needs. 33 34 THE COMMISSIONER: Just pausing there, I think I know by now, but just to be sure and for the transcript, when you 35 36 say, "we're seeing more 'complex patients' being discharged out in the community", can you give me some examples of 37 what you mean by "more complex patients"? 38 39 40 MS PICKERING: Multiple comorbidities, multiple care 41 needs. It may no longer just be the simple wound care that the nurses are going in to provide care for. The nurses 42 43 are also identifying the decreased mobility, the other 44 factors that are a risk factor for someone in their own 45 home, and so they're needing to reach out to many services 46 to ensure there's care wrapped around that person to try 47 and prevent a hospital presentation.

1 So a mix of various illnesses but also 2 THE COMMISSIONER: 3 risks? 4 5 MS PICKERING: Absolutely. 6 7 DR WATERHOUSE: Given they're being moved out more quickly 8 than perhaps they used to be, and obviously with the 9 community support, do you find there is an increased risk 10 of readmissions with people bouncing back because they 11 weren't quite ready? 12 13 MS PICKERING: Yes, there is. We do try, on the Central 14 Coast, we do have a follow-up phone call service. So for people over the age of 65 that have been discharged from 15 16 one of our hospitals, we do have some enrolled nurses that 17 will conduct follow-up phone calls within 48 hours, and the purpose of that is to, as much as possible, try and ensure 18 19 that our older people have managed to get an appointment 20 with their GP as a follow-up, and that they've actually 21 managed to get to a pharmacy to get their medications that 22 are required, and so if that has - if the answer is no to those, then health will come in to try and help facilitate 23 24 and ensure that those things have occurred. 25 26 DR WATERHOUSE: Sorry, Ms Okulicz? 27 28 MS OKULICZ: Just in terms of readmission, in terms of our 29 older persons, the impact of that, so we have a lot of patients that again refuse - even though it's identified 30 31 that you probably won't manage at home and you should 32 probably have 24-hour care, they're adamant they're going 33 to go home, so it's called a high-risk discharge. We 34 explain all the risks to them about going home. We try to 35 put as many services or supports in place to give them the 36 best chance of being at home, but they will go home and within two to five days, they haven't coped and they will 37 come back to hospital. So then we've got to start the 38 39 whole process again, because they - they're just adamant 40 they want to go home and they have no interest in going 41 into a nursing home, and they have capacity. So therefore we have to honour their requests, but it just means 42 43 a re-present. 44 45 We can be doing this with one person multiple times

45 We can be doing this with one person multiple times 46 a year because they're adamant they're not going to go into 47 care. They will go home for a few days, they'll come back

1 to hospital for a three weeks, they'll go home for a few 2 days, they come back to hospital for three weeks. Like, 3 it's a vicious cycle. 4 Do you ever try like a gate leave approach 5 DR WATERHOUSE: whereby you see if they can manage at home but they're 6 7 still technically admitted to the ward, they haven't been 8 discharged? 9 10 MS OKULICZ: Not so much from my ward. I know 11 rehabilitation do that to assess them in their own home, 12 but not from us. We try to do as many assessments as we can in the hospital, like simulating their environment in 13 terms of how many stairs they've got, how wide their 14 hallway is, can they have a four-wheel walker, do they need 15 16 a stick, making sure - going through all of those 17 assessments, that's more what we do. 18 19 DR WATERHOUSE: And that again would depend on having 20 operational therapists and so on to make those assessments. 21 22 MS OKULICZ: Correct. 23 DR WATERHOUSE: Yes, Ms Pickering? 24 25 If I can just add to that, we do have on 26 MS PICKERING: the Central Coast a transitional care unit. So for some of 27 28 those older people where there is a goal that's quite 29 achievable to try and help them to return to home safely. There's that 12-week program that could either be in the 30 31 home as a package, but we actually have an inpatient area 32 and they will do some gate leave or support an older person 33 to go home for a period to see how they manage with the view if they need to return and it's still within that time 34 35 frame, that they can return to the transitional care unit. 36 37 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. If I just go to those online, Ms Hawkins, can you tell me what is the effect in your 38 wards, on the staff, that is, of these patients, 39 40 particularly those with the challenging behavioural issues 41 that you've mentioned but no acute need? 42 43 MS HAWKINS: I believe that there have been guite a few 44 things that have already been touched on, which would be 45 relevant to our area as well, but I think for our aged care 46 patients, the majority of the time, what they're needing is They're needing time and assistance. And what that 47 time.

1 means is that those additional duties or additional tasks, 2 which may result in needing assistance with feeding or to assist in terms of equipment or additional staff to perform 3 4 that care, in terms of if there's incontinence and 5 additional toileting needs, there's additional time that is taken and required, and that's notwithstanding in terms of 6 7 behaviours of concern and the appropriate care that results 8 I think that there is, obviously, the emotional from that. 9 and physical demands that result in that, and there is -10 sometimes where there's a one-to-one need, we have what's called a - there are forms that we need to submit to be 11 able to get nurse specials. 12 13

14 Oftentimes, the behaviour needs and requirements of 15 our patients don't meet the triaging tool that would mean 16 that a nurse special would be indicated, so we're having to 17 look after those patients within our numbers.

At the moment we have a few patients that are requiring one to one care. What that means is that the, I guess, emotional and physical demands can increase fatigue.

24 There are also the concerns in regards to, you know, 25 sick leave and staffing shortages. We do try and manage 26 that as best we can, but it's also - notwithstanding on our core patients that we have on our ward, but it's also the 27 28 impact on staff on our outlying wards, having to look after 29 patients that they're not familiar with in terms of the behavioural and nursing management needs of those patients, 30 31 but also on the medical staff, when, from an environmental 32 perspective, you've got your patients on our wards, for 33 example, that are under geries, and then on outlying wards 34 it is the physical distance that our doctors are having to 35 travel to be able to round on those patients and the delays 36 in time from having to travel over a wider footprint, for 37 example, at Wollongong Hospital. Doctors may need to travel between, you know, six or seven wards to be able to 38 see all of their patients so that's obviously resulting in 39 40 delays then, which may impact in terms of doctors' 41 abilities to complete all their tasks within their work 42 I think that covers that. time.

44 DR WATERHOUSE: Do you find that the staff on those wards 45 where there are outlier patients are reaching out to you 46 and your colleagues for advice about how to manage some of 47 these complex behaviours?

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2 MS HAWKINS: Yes, so we've also got our aged care CNC that's on site as well, so in terms of complex behaviour 3 4 management they do defer to our aged care CNC in that 5 regard, given the fact that I have worn a bit of a dual hat in terms of nurse unit manager of the aged care ward and 6 7 also the aged care navigator, I do get contacted from time 8 to time in regards to the care planning of those patients 9 and the intricacies about care pathways - so whether they 10 are going to be discharged home with service packages or 11 whether they're going to go to residential care. Often nurse unit managers and/or core staff will give me a phone 12 13 call, and I can chat through them, and I'm happy to do so, 14 but yes, I do get contacted. 15

16 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you.

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Professor Potter, you're the sort of doctor in this space and a senior doctor and you obviously see the effect on staff. You've touched on this before a little, but can you just go into more detail now about what it is that you see as the impacts on both medical staff and other clinical staff?

25 **PROFESSOR POTTER:** Okay, particularly with medical staff, 26 the junior medical staff in the last three years, as this 27 problem has been mounting, are completely distressed. 28 I regularly have staff, young doctors, who are just coming 29 into medicine, in tears at the end of shifts, doing lots and lots of overtime. They ultimately have more sick 30 31 leave. They feel discontented. Our senior doctors have 32 great empathy towards them but feel that they're getting an 33 awful experience of what geriatric medicine is.

So if you're in a particular geriatric medicine ward with a multidisciplinary team and a NUM and nurses who understand geriatric medicine, your experience as a junior doctor is one of empowerment. You understand how to look after these people.

0ur poor doctors are trying to see their cohort of
20 patients and they're going into eight, nine, 10,
11 wards, where they're trying to find a nurse unit manager
who can't really tell them anything about the patient,
they're seeing terrible outcomes. They feel like failures
and they don't want to do geriatric medicine anymore, and
given the majority of the admissions are an ageing

1 population, that's an awful thing. 2 3 For our senior doctors, that's incredibly distressing 4 They don't like that our junior doctors see other as well. 5 medical teams sitting having a coffee and a debrief with the staff, where we're still going round at 7 o'clock in 6 7 the evening. 8 9 So that's terribly demoralising both for the specialty 10 going forward but particularly for these young doctors where this is their first experience. You always hope that 11 12 having done a term in geriatric medicine you will feel 13 empowered to deal with these challenging patients, and 14 that's what we aspire to, and, unfortunately, that's getting more and more difficult to guarantee. 15 16 17 So that's the main thing, is the terrible burnout and 18 distress amongst the juniors, which, as a senior doctor, 19 that's a horrible thing to deal with. You really don't 20 want to be responsible for your service creating that in a 21 junior. 22 But I also would extend that to the nursing staff, the 23 24 allied staff, the visitors, the other patients where these 25 patients are not being looked after in a way that meets their needs and amps up the distress, because everyone else 26 27 in the ward feels that. Everyone else in the ED feels 28 It just creates a sensation of distress throughout that. 29 the hospital. 30 31 DR WATERHOUSE: With the junior doctors and, I suppose, 32 senior doctors as well, do you have consultation with 33 colleagues in other hospitals and districts to see whether 34 they're having a similar experience, and is it similar, or 35 is this a particular issue in Illawarra? 36 37 PROFESSOR POTTER: It is particularly an issue in the I don't doubt that 10 years from now, if 38 Illawarra. something drastic doesn't change in the Commonwealth 39 40 residential aged care system, it will be the same for everyone, and I sincerely hope that this Inquiry actually 41 results in some sort of change, but at the moment, it's 42 43 particularly a problem for the Illawarra. 44 45 Nowhere else - and I have looked - nowhere else has 46 had anything like the aged care failure, market failure, that we've had. It's really quite remarkable. As I say, 47

at the moment we've lost more than 600 permanent beds and
the projections are that that's going to go up to 1,000,
and nobody's looking to producing those beds again. So it
really is a stalemate and a real sharp focus in the
Illawarra.

7 Hopefully, we can use that to the good and actually 8 become an area where we might be able to show what we can 9 do differently, and we're definitely trying very hard to do 10 But definitely, I don't think it's as much of that. a problem elsewhere, and that combined with what I said 11 12 before about the college not recognising that you could do all of your advanced training down here. 13 If you've had two 14 years down here under that that level of pressure, even if your kids are at school down here, and you go up to Sydney 15 16 and everything's so much calmer, you're not going to come 17 back, you're going to stay there and move your kids.

As somebody who came out here from Scotland 20 years ago to build up geriatric medicine, we were doing brilliantly up until four years ago and we're just going backwards rapidly, which is really disappointing.

DR WATERHOUSE: When you refer there to "the college", do you mean the college of physicians?

27 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, HETI and the college of 28 Royal College of Physicians, we recently had physicians. 29 accreditation. We get accreditation every five years. When I first came here we had no accreditation for 30 31 geriatric medicine. We now we have accreditation for 32 training up to eight advanced trainees in geriatric 33 medicine.

However, despite the fact that we've got 35 36 15 supervisors, nine sites, we cover things like Aboriginal communities, we've got a vast difference between rural, 37 regional, urban. You know, we can offer everything and we 38 The college still don't see that. 39 have the supervisors. 40 you know, the difference between a term in Sutherland at 41 St George is not - that that's different enough to count as a separate term, whereas the difference between Nowra and 42 43 Wollongong is no different at all. 44

That's very disappointing to get that sort of city-centric view. Given that the population are retiring to the rural and regional areas and that they're ageing

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faster there, I would have thought that we could look at that and come up with something. So we keep trying. We're constantly, you know, lobbying and asking and explaining what we can offer down here, and the feedback from our trainees, despite the stress, is overwhelmingly positive about what we're giving them. But we haven't as yet been able to change that mindset.

9 DR WATERHOUSE: Given that there is ageing of the 10 population, do you think that this is something that should 11 be a focus for other colleges as well, not just those that 12 train geriatricians.

14 PROFESSOR POTTER: Absolutely. As I pointed out earlier, patients who go to surgical specialties, all specialties 15 16 apart from paediatrics and obstetrics, they are now taking 17 much older patients than they did 20 years ago. Twentv years ago, if you presented to hospital with a cardiac 18 19 event and you were 90, you would have no chance of getting 20 into a coronary care unit. Now you'll get every chance of 21 getting into a coronary care unit.

23 However, what happens then is the coronary care unit 24 fixes whatever needs fixing in your heart but they then cannot deal with any of the rest of the patient. 25 So our 26 consult numbers in the last four years have gone up from 27 about 25 a week, to other teams, to over 60 a week. We're 28 asked all the time to solve this patient who is in the 29 cardiology ward, solve this patient who is in the respiratory ward, and particularly the surgical wards, you 30 know, our surgical trainees - it's becoming more and more 31 32 operation specific, you know, procedure specific, not 33 holistic as in the whole patient. But unfortunately, as 34 they're doing these procedures in older and older patients, 35 the patients' needs are multifactorial with 36 multi-comorbidities that the surgeons are not trained to 37 understand and nor do they choose to.

I think the problem is developing and I have no doubt it will become an all-of-Australia problem if we don't change what we're doing at the moment. But as I say, I'm eternally optimistic that we will.

44 DR WATERHOUSE: So to give an example, perhaps, if 45 a person comes in with a fractured neck of femur, an 46 elderly person, with perhaps a number of comorbidities, is 47 it the case that the surgeons will fix the fracture and

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1 then want to hand it over to the geriatricians to patch up 2 other things and improve medications and so on and so 3 forth? 4 5 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, that's a particularly good example because that has been the case and been recognised as the 6 7 case for more than 10 years now. As a result of that there 8 is now an established - the whole of Australia and 9 New Zealand have a hip fracture registry where it's a best 10 practice, and recognised best practice, with audited results, that you have formal shared care for fractured 11 neck of femur in elderly people. 12 13 14 The other thing that's happening in Wollongong Hospital is we have formal shared care with surgeons and 15 16 pain specialists for blunt - with rib fractures for 17 elderly. So that's been recognised in those areas, and 18 it's been staffed in those areas and it's working well and 19 it is audited and peer reviewed. However, we now see 20 patients having vascular procedures, you know, abdominal 21 aortic aneurysm ruptures in their 90s being operated on 22 where that wouldn't have happened before. 23 24 I'm not saving it shouldn't have happened, but we need to have the staffing and the mix of skills to be able to 25 26 look after those patients, not just get them off the 27 operating theatre alive. That's not the goal. We need to 28 actually get them well enough to leave the hospital, 29 otherwise we shouldn't be doing the procedure. 30 31 So I think there's a lag. It has been recognised in 32 orthopaedics but it really has not been recognised yet in 33 any of the other specialties. 34 DR WATERHOUSE: 35 I know Ms Hawkins wants to say something 36 but I want to ask you one other question about junior doctors. Is it fair to say that even though a lot of these 37 patients are no longer requiring acute care, the junior 38 doctors still need to be very actively involved because 39 40 they have to deal with medication errors, assess them if 41 they fall, and so on and so forth? So they're still having 42 to be very involved even though the person is not acutely unwell; is that correct? 43 44 45 PROFESSOR POTTER: That's absolutely correct. So although 46 they're not acutely unwell and they've got over their acute problem, as long as they're in a hospital environment 47

that's not appropriate to their needs, they have much 1 2 higher hospital-acquired complications, so they have 3 medication complications, they're more likely to fall, 4 they're more likely to have urinary infections, continence 5 issues, so the junior doctors are still having to do as much work with that patient group as they would be, and in 6 7 fact, in the acute phase it's actually much more 8 straightforward because you've got a protocol to follow, 9 whereas it's all these other little comorbidities that are 10 popping up that cause these other problems. 11 DR WATERHOUSE: 12 Ms Hawkins? 13 14 MS HAWKINS: I was just going to say in support of 15 Dr Potter when she was talking about the demand on the 16 consulting service of geriatricians at Wollongong Hospital, 17 typically when a patient not admitted under the care of 18 a geriatrician is requested to be consulted, at times it's 19 when the presenting problem of that patient is complete and 20 it is more so for the complex discharge planning care needs 21 of the patient that is over the age of 65, the geriatrician 22 service is then requested to consult. 23 24 Typically, they will accept that patient, which then 25 will result in that patient needing to be bed boarded for 26 GEM, which is geriatric evaluation and management, and that 27 will typically result in a patient being bed boarded 28 peripherally for either Shellharbour Hospital or for Bulli 29 hospital for that level of service, which then obviously results in bed block of those patients within the acute 30 31 wards. 32 33 DR WATERHOUSE: Sorry, is bed boarded when they're put on 34 a list to go to another bed or another hospital? 35 36 MS HAWKINS: Correct. It's when they're requested to go 37 to another hospital, yes. 38 I'm going to move on to some of the other 39 DR WATERHOUSE: 40 actions that have been taken and the other possible 41 solutions, but before I do, are there some more things to Sorry, Mr Shortis? 42 be said? 43 44 I just wanted to go back to something that we MR SHORTIS: 45 mentioned before. We spoke about whether I had seen 46 burnout in my staff, and that's not something I have actual experience of, but listening to the conversation, the 47

environment that I work in is different, and Melissa has 1 2 mentioned this, we have some ability to rearrange our 3 workload to some extent. So I suppose whilst I don't see 4 burnout, what I see is different. As a manager I'm often trying to manage my staff to get out of work on time 5 because they're wanting to provide the gold standard care 6 7 and ensure everything's been done, whereas what I'm doing 8 is making sure that the care that's required, that's 9 absolutely required, is provided, not the stuff that makes 10 everything else better for the client. 11 12 DR WATERHOUSE: Anything else you wanted to add? No. Looking, then, at some of the actions taken, I might 13 Okav. 14 start with Mr Wakeling. 15 16 Can you talk us through any actions you know of, 17 particularly about NDIS patients, obviously we'll come to the aged care but I want to make sure we don't lose sight 18 19 of those types of patients. So what actions are being 20 taken by the district in relation to those delays? 21 22 MR WAKELING: Specifically for the NDIS, I can't comment. 23 I'm more focused on a broader comment. So the first thing 24 that we would be doing is we've changed the bed base of the hospital or the layout of the LHD, if that's - is that 25 26 relevant back to your question? 27 28 DR WATERHOUSE: Yes. 29 Then I will continue. Yes? MR WAKELING: 30 31 32 DR WATERHOUSE: Yes, sure. 33 34 MR WAKELING: I will say Illawarra in particular has 35 a large amount of hospitals. A lot of those are, you know, 36 historical, because of the coal mining that occurred in the area, they are all 100 years old. Linking back to some of 37 the other comments of the other panel members, including 38 Professor Potter, moving patients between these very small 39 40 hospitals is detrimental to the patients' outcomes, and 41 from a financial perspective, a lot of these hospitals are at a bed base of, you know, 40 to - some are 20, they just 42 43 do not make economical sense from a bed-base perspective. 44 45 But what we've done is we've turned Coledale 46 Hospital - in 2022, we converted that from a rehab hospital to purely a maintenance hospital that specialises in aged 47

1 care and specifically for patients that are awaiting aged 2 care, with dementia, that are wandering or aggressive, like 3 the panel members have mentioned. So that's a 38-bed 4 purpose-built unit for those patients. 5 6 In November 2023, we had further bed block occurring, so it was increasing, like Professor Potter said over the 7 8 last four years, so then we outsourced more transitional 9 aged care beds, 20 more, to Figtree Private Hospital, and 10 then a further six to 15, where we flex up and down with Shellharbour Private Hospital. So Figtree, a Ramsay Health 11 Care provider, Shellharbour a Healthe Care provider. 12 13 14 Then in June 2024, similar to what Rachael mentioned, we had to respond to the winter, where we ran out of surge 15 16 capacity, and that was impacting our emergency departments 17 to function and our offload of ambulance. So we opened further surge beds at C7 east at Wollongong Hospital, the 18 ward that Rachael manages, a further eight beds at 19 20 Shoalhaven Hospital, just for residential aged care 21 maintenance patients. 22 I think, really importantly, these beds aren't 23 funded, they're not planned, they just had to occur, and 24 they're heavily reliant on casual staff. 25 So the plans 26 would be to change - to close those surge beds if the 27 external factors improve, but at this case, I don't see 28 that happening in the short term. 29 Other changes that we are making are bed-base changes 30 31 where a specialty may not need as many beds with the 32 footprint that they've been given and the staffing cohort 33 that has been allocated, and increasing the bed base for 34 specialties like geriatric medicine, like Professor Potter said, to cope with that influx of demand that's occurred 35 36 over the last few years. That would be my comment on what we're doing in regards to bed-base changes. 37 38 DR WATERHOUSE: Do you meet with resistance from those 39 40 specialties if you try to take away part of their bed base 41 because they want to preserve it? 42 43 MR WAKELING: I would agree with that and I would say that 44 behaviours may occur to retain the occupancy of that bed 45 base, so the discharging may be prolonged to make sure that 46 the occupancy stays the same. We would benchmark that length of stay compared to similar specialties across 47 6223

1 New South Wales or Australia, to see if that is an 2 inefficient service from a length of stay perspective or an 3 efficient service, but, yes, we would encounter challenges. 4 5 DR WATERHOUSE: Just to make sure I understand that correctly, what you're saying is if another specialty feels 6 7 that they may have beds taken away, they tend to make sure 8 those beds keep patients in them and they don't discharge 9 people so that it will make them look busier but that, in 10 fact, is inefficient relative to their peer hospitals; is 11 that what you're saying? 12 That's correct, yes. 13 MR WAKELING: What we would encourage is innovation or new models of care. 14 So the one 15 thing that they might be worried about is the funding of 16 their specialty. They may not want a physical bed 17 footprint but they would want to maintain the budget that's 18 provided to that specialty, so we would encourage 19 a different model of care, and that certainly is a focus at 20 Illawarra Shoalhaven, models of care that don't have 21 a hospital bed footprint. 22 23 DR WATERHOUSE: So what you will say to that department or specialty is, "The budget is ring-fenced. We've removing 24 some of the inpatient funding. We'd like to divert it to 25 some sort of innovative non-inpatient type arrangement or 26 27 model of care"; is that what you mean? 28 29 MR WAKELING: That's what I mean. So we would encourage the movement to more outpatient clinics, for example, or 30 31 more home-based services that might still be managed by the 32 LHD and that specialty, alongside primarily allied health 33 or nurses as well, but it's just outside the hospital 34 environment. 35 Professor Potter, I understand that for 36 DR WATERHOUSE: the outliers you do regular ward rounds across the hospital 37 to try and help manage those, which is obviously a model of 38 What other sorts of innovations have you tried to 39 care. 40 introduce to deal with the challenges? 41 42 PROFESSOR POTTER: There have been quite a few, actually, 43 and some more successful than others. Right up-front 44 I would have to say that our chief executive has been 45 incredibly supportive, so much so that we put up models of 46 care which we were promised funding for, which we have not seen the funding for, which is having a negative effect on 47

our bottom line, which we're still persisting, because they 1 2 are having good clinical outcomes. So the main one about 3 that is we developed an aged care outreach service, so 4 that - like a flying squad. So we've got a nurse 5 practitioners, geriatricians, ordinary level registered nurses and AINs, and we are now - we've had that running 6 7 for more than a year now. In the first year - and that's 8 purely to support residential aged care and we focused on 9 preventing ED presentations.

So for the first year of that team - we've only got it 11 12 in the Illawarra, we don't have it in Shoalhaven vet. The first year of that there were 7,000 referrals to the 13 service from residential aged care of which we were able to 14 15 give advice to maintain patients in the facility for 5,000. 16 We actually physically went out and visited 2,000, and for 17 90 per cent of those patients, we prevented an ED 18 In the 10 per cent that still required to presentation. 19 come to hospital, for 2 per cent of those, we were able to 20 negotiate a direct admission and bypass the ED, so we're 21 preventing that 12-hour spell where the patient will 22 deteriorate.

24 That model of care is fantastic. We're getting great 25 feedback about it. The staff members are getting great satisfaction out of doing it. The families are loving it. 26 What we would like to do is expand the funding for that so 27 28 we could support aged care facilities at the early 29 discharge from hospital and with difficult behaviours rather than just focusing on ED. We would also like to 30 31 roll that out to Shoalhaven. That's probably the main 32 We've also put an ED -thing.

DR WATERHOUSE: Sorry, I just want to ask you a little bit more about that outreach service. So the referrals are made by aged care facilities to the service?

38 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes.

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40 DR WATERHOUSE: Are they patients that they just have 41 queries about or is it somebody that they're about to call 42 an ambulance and send them to hospital?

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44 PROFESSOR POTTER: Originally we worked with our extended
45 paramedic ambulance as well. Originally the criteria was
46 somebody you're about to put in an ambulance and either the
47 aged care facility would call us or the extended paramedics

from NSW Ambulance would call us.

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In fact, as they realised that we were responsive, and we're running seven days a week until 10pm at night, so as they realised that we were actually a lot more responsive and available than the GPs that they might be able to access, they started calling us about everything.

9 So the first year, we had to really do a lot of 10 counselling and things with that, and say, "That's not" -11 you know, "We're a limited resource, we're focusing on ED." 12 So we worked with them over the year and it's got a lot 13 better, the referrals have got a lot more appropriate, and 14 as I said, the feedback has been really good from families 15 and patients.

17 We tried to link in with the GP as much as possible but one of the things that became apparent with that 18 19 service is there really is a problem out there with GP 20 provision to residential aged care which, as I said, there 21 are new models coming through from the Commonwealth that 22 might improve that. So we do want to try and expand that further down to Shoalhaven and also expand the remit 23 24 further so that we can support other things. So that's 25 been a great success.

Will I go on to other initiatives?

29 DR WATERHOUSE: Yes, please do.

PROFESSOR POTTER: 31 So we've also put an ED navigator, so 32 a bit like Rachael being the aged care nurse navigator, we 33 have an emergency navigator in the emergency department at 34 Wollongong Hospital, and they have expanded to working with our outreach team, our flying squad, so that if there's 35 36 somebody who has actually got into ED that is from an aged care facility, they will liaise with the flying squad in 37 the morning and say, "Could we take them straight back to 38 the facility and you will support them there?" So again 39 40 that's helping, that's working as well and that's been 41 a good thing to do.

As Ben mentioned, we've expanded our Commonwealth supported places into the private hospitals, so we've got some extra beds there, but it's a drop in the ocean. There is, on average, 150 patients waiting for placement, and that's 20 beds. It's not really going to solve it.

1 2 The Bulli urgent care centre, which Ben spoke about 3 earlier, is predominantly VMOs and a nurse practitioner 4 model of care. It's helpful in that it is preventing other 5 things attending ED. So it doesn't help our frail elderly 6 people but it does help the whole picture. 7 8 We've also got - the things that Ben was talking about 9 with virtual care, we have encouraged other departments to 10 expand that so that their inpatient requirements are less. 11 12 We're trying to do some collaborative commissioning 13 work with the private health care network looking at 14 specific diagnoses of discharge to see whether we could 15 support them in the community with specialists liaising 16 with GPs, and that's working for things like chronic 17 obstructive pulmonary disease, but I see that, in the 18 future, that could work with dementia or frailty or falls 19 risks, so that's something we're trying to explore. 20 21 We've had a lot of high level meetings with state and 22 Commonwealth which - we're not getting there yet but we're 23 floating things and we're trying to. We recognise that 24 there's a lot of Commonwealth funded initiatives lying in residential aged care where, although the funding sits with 25 26 the Commonwealth, they don't actually have the means, you 27 know, if the aged care providers are not going to open 28 homes there's nothing very much the Commonwealth can do to 29 force that. 30 31 We're trying to suggest that perhaps we could open 32 some facilities. There's a disused facility that has not 33 been knocked down or sold in our area. We said, "If we 34 could staff that, would you fund it?" So we're looking at Is there some other way to get some aged 35 things like that. 36 care beds? We've asked whether we could look at some of 37 our current hospitals, our peripheral sites, where we are just full now of dementia-specific patients, could we 38 actually get the Commonwealth to give us the funding for 39 40 that so that we could open the acute beds that we've lost 41 elsewhere, as part of the planning for new builds? 42 43 These are the sorts of things we're trying to do. 44 Varied success with our flying squad, success with some of 45 the other models in and out of ED, not yet definitely 46 seeing the funding for those, but we will keep pushing, but other models that we want to try and support the

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Commonwealth to act together, where the Commonwealth 1 2 provide the funding but we actually make the thing happen, 3 you know, we're optimistic that we might get somewhere with 4 these things but as I say, at the moment because Illawarra Shoalhaven is usually at the pointy end of this problem, 5 we're trying to turn that around from a disaster to an 6 7 opportunity to see whether we can actually get Commonwealth 8 on side to say, "Well, this is the amount of money we're 9 not spending on aged care facilities in the Illawarra. 10 What can you do with it to make it work for the rest of the hospital and for that patient group?" And I think that's 11 12 the main things that - oh, there's one or model that the Commonwealth is funding, that's called special care 13 14 dementia funding, and that's now running for nine beds in the HammondCare in our district. 15 16

17 So Commonwealth fund HammondCare to provide the 18 HammondCare contract with Illawarra Shoalhaven service. 19 and we provide a geriatrician and we provide specialist 20 training for - actually forensically disturbed dementia 21 patients. So where the behaviours are terrifying and so 22 awful, we work together with HammondCare to train HammondCare, to train the nursing staff and to look at 23 24 trying to get some of these patients well enough to go into mainline residential. 25

I've also floated an initiative for the future with the University of Wollongong to see whether, because of all these models that we've got, could we look at opening a training centre to empower GPs, nurses and allieds to know how to work with dementia patients. Again we haven't got off the ground with that, but we're trying to put all these initiatives out there.

35 DR WATERHOUSE: I want to hear from some others.

I'm mindful of the time, Commissioner, are you happy
for me to continue? I probably just have a few more
minutes, I think.

41 THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

43 DR WATERHOUSE: Just one thing before I move to the 44 others, can I clarify in terms of your conversations with 45 the Commonwealth, how have you actually been able to 46 facilitate those? Has that been done sort of at an 47 executive LHD level, paving the way, or have you just

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1 approached the Commonwealth directly? How does it work? 2 3 No, we've been working very closely PROFESSOR POTTER: 4 with our CMO, - what's the word - CE, our boss, Margot 5 Mains. We've been working very closely with Margot and she's very on side with everything we're attempting to do. 6 7 She's taken it up via the ministry, the ministry have 8 approached the Commonwealth, and we've now got a series of 9 workshop type meetings. 10 We keep doing one step forward, two steps to the side, 11 so we're not quite getting there yet but at least we've 12 opened a door, we've got a dialogue going, we've floated 13 14 some suggestions. So, you know, we remain optimistic and we're trying very hard and as I say, I think from 15 16 a NSW Health perspective, if we don't do something about 17 this problem, we've audited what we're doing, we're not creating the problem, the problem has been created, so if 18 19 we don't start doing something differently, this is going to become a problem for all of NSW Health. So I think, you 20 21 know, we need to keep this dialogue going and see what we 22 can do, but we've been very well supported by our CE. 23 24 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. 25 Ms Pickering, I'm just interested to know what sorts 26 of strategies, like outreach, for example, have been done 27 28 in the Central Coast? 29 MS PICKERING: Sure. On the Central Coast, there's 30 31 a number of strategies that we have put in place. We do 32 have what we call the virtual care and triage service, 33 which has two functions, one is a monitoring function and 34 that's more for those patients that may - not just older, but it may include older patients, that can be discharged 35 36 but the medical team or the nursing team are just not guite sure and might think they just need some follow-up, so it's 37 a virtual care component of care. 38 39 40 We also have the intake line, and the intake is 41 primarily for residential aged care facilities, GPs and NSW Ambulance. The majority of calls that come through are 42 43 from residential aged care facilities, and similar to Jan 44 was saying, it will then link the caller through to the 45 aged care response team that we have on the Central Coast 46 for those facilities. 47

1 The aged care response team consists of - we have two 2 nurse practitioner positions, although one of those is 3 vacant at the moment, and registered nursing staff. They 4 work from 8am to 7.30pm seven days a week and they will 5 respond to those calls that are what we call priority response, in that if we don't respond on the same day, 6 7 they're likely to present to hospital. So we will, as much 8 as possible, do the same-day response, although if it is 9 a care need that can wait until the next day, we will do 10 that as well.

Similar stats to what was being described earlier, of 12 13 those calls that come through that are a priority response, 14 we do avoid hospital more than 90 per cent of the time, Given it is a nursing model of 15 with a timely response. 16 care, the team do have connections with geriatricians, our 17 palliative care staff specialists as well as our Hospital 18 in the Home medical staff. In those instances where they 19 think they can avoid a hospital presentation, the nurses 20 are unable to contact the GP, but they just need some 21 medical, I guess, guidance, we do have those relationships 22 in place.

The other thing, I guess, the aged care response team do is a lot of capacity building within the facilities. So they will look at trends of the types of calls that they're getting. A recent example would be a facility where there were often calls for blocked catheters, so then we will focus some education on catheter management, how to do catheter changes with the nursing staff that are there.

We are cognisant that there can be a high turnover of staff in facilities and there is also a high proportion of agency staff used in facilities, so it's often not just a one-off education. And we have, I guess, more recently recorded the education to make it available for the facility, because of the staff there being so fluid.

DR WATERHOUSE: Just before you go on, does that translate
in your experience to a reduction in those calls, that
these staff are empowered at those facilities?

43 MS PICKERING: It has in that facility, yes. The other 44 thing is we have our Hospital in the Home service which 45 I guess more recently we - and again, this has been funded 46 by the district, it wasn't through additional funds, we 47 have got at the moment temporarily the 10 additional beds

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1 2 3 4	that have got a real focus on the older person, and is primarily allied health led, still under the admitted medical model of the HITH staff specialist.
5 6 7 8 9	That's something that's working quite well where we are able to wrap allied health support and assistance around the older person in the community whilst still under the admitting medical officer which is either a geriatrician or our HITH staff specialist.
10 11	We also have our alternate ambulance pathways, so with
12	NSW Ambulance we've got agreed pathways in place that they
13	can contact our virtual care and triage line for older
14	people either in the community or in a residential aged
15	care facility, where together we can actually work out,
16	I guess, the best care location for them, rather than
17	presenting to a hospital, where it is safe to do so and
18	where we have the resources available to respond to their
19	care needs at that time.
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21	The other, I guess, thing is we've got quite a good
22	relationship with our PHN, so our primary health network,
23	on the Central Coast. They did some work, probably just
24	post COVID, looking at the virtual care capacity within our
25	residential aged care facilities and supporting the
26	facilities with, I guess, their virtual care capacity, so
27	we do have a lot of virtual care.
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29	So where if a nurse practitioner is unable to go into
30	a facility right at that moment, we've got the capacity to
31	be able to provide the care virtually and also link in to
32	some of our other specialist nurses including our wound
33	management nurse practitioners, for example.
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35	DR WATERHOUSE: Do you find that there are financial
36	barriers to introducing some of these initiatives or is
37	there generally support for them because they're recognised
38	as having downstream benefits?
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40	MS PICKERING: I think it's probably a combination of
41	both. There definitely is financial barriers. You know,
42	the example I've just provide with our older people within
43	the Hospital in the Home service, it was time-limited
44	funding; the funding sort of is no longer there. As
45	a district, we can see absolutely the benefit of it, so it
46	is continuing at the moment, but we will be evaluating that
47	particular program, in combination with other programs that

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we introduced, to look at whether they will be continuing
 into the future.

4 DR WATERHOUSE: Ms Okulicz, is there any particular 5 initiatives that you've tried on the ward that have been 6 successful to manage the challenges that you've been 7 describing?

9 MS OKULICZ: For a while we, through COVID, were given 10 additional funding for what's called a health care worker, 11 so they were an additional person. They weren't an AIN, it 12 was just a person who was willing to come in and work and 13 work with the patients, they were across the hospital.

What our health care worker did was really good at 15 16 building therapeutic relationships with some of our 17 patients, especially when they had been there for a long 18 She would take them for walks, she would sit with time. 19 them and play card games with them, ensure that their menus 20 were ordered correctly or, like, have they lost their teeth 21 or the dentures. She would also do all their washing. We 22 had a washer dryer on site in our unit, so she would go 23 through and make sure everyone's washing was done and she 24 would keep track of that.

She was very instrumental in building our activity trolley. It has diversional activities within the trolley that we can use, but again it's having the time to sit with the patients to use those and she was very much the person who did that.

32 She definitely helped alleviate some behaviours 33 because of that, because she would really get to know them 34 and she would know what their triggers were and she could intervene, and it also just freed up a lot of the nursing 35 36 time to go and deal with some nursing allocated tasks. So But, unfortunately, COVID funding ran out 37 she was great. and all the health care workers no longer have positions 38 within the hospital. So we've lost that resource. 39

41 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you.

43 Mr Shortis, are there actions being taken in a 44 community health setting to deal with some of these things, 45 initiatives you've tried, and so on?

47 MR SHORTIS: Similar to the other districts, we provide

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1 education into nursing homes and we certainly have nurse 2 practitioners that go in there. 3 4 One of the things that I haven't heard mentioned that 5 we've done at Nepean is we've employed some geriatricians in our primary care and community health service. 6 What 7 that allows is the primary care and community health staff 8 to refer directly to the geriatrician, to get them 9 reviewed, to get their care needs addressed and make sure 10 that they're on the best possible treatment. 11 12 Other work that we've been doing around aged care is 13 ensuring that we're tracking the patients appropriately so 14 that the clients who we're providing - the clients who 15 we're providing care to with home care packages, we're in 16 negotiations with the home care package providers to make 17 sure that they're either providing the care or we're doing the care or we're providing them support for the care, 18 19 similar things like that. 20 21 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. 22 And Ms Hawkins, do you have anything to add about 23 initiatives you have tried at a local level on the ward or 24 just within the hospital? 25 26 27 Specific to C7 east aged care, it would be MS HAWKINS: 28 diversional therapy cover at Wollongong Hospital. It's not 29 something that we've experienced before, and from what I've observed in terms of the effects that it's had on our 30 31 patients, irrespective of their behaviour, I feel it has 32 been significant. 33 34 Others which may have already been touched on that I'm aware of at a district level is the transitional aged care 35 36 beds at Figtree Private Hospital, which is the 20 beds 37 there. What has been trialled over the last three years, also which Dr Potter's touched on as well, is the aged care 38 nurse navigator role, which had an overview and oversight 39 40 of all geriatric patients at Wollongong. They're what I'm 41 aware of. 42 43 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. 44 45 I suppose I just want to finish with an understanding 46 from each of you. There's obviously a lot of really good 47 initiatives already happening --

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1 2 THE COMMISSIONER: Can I go back just to clarify something 3 with Professor Potter. Also, I can see Mr Wakeling has his 4 hand up, but if I can just go back just so that 5 I understand something that was said a bit earlier on this topic. For anyone following, it is at 6227 at about line 6 7 20 of the transcript. 8 9 You told me, Professor Potter, that you've - well, 10 "we've", that is the LHDs, had a lot of high-level meetings with state and Commonwealth, and you said: 11 12 13 We've had a lot of high level meetings with state and Commonwealth which - we're not 14 getting there yet but we're floating things 15 16 and we're trying to. We recognise that 17 there's a lot of Commonwealth funded 18 initiatives. 19 20 And then you go on to say: 21 22 If the aged care providers are not going to open homes there's nothing very much the 23 Commonwealth can do to force that. 24 We're trying to suggest that perhaps we could 25 open some facilities. There's a disused 26 facility that has not been knocked down or 27 28 sold in our area ... so we're looking at 29 things like that. 30 What should I actually understand by that? 31 That's 32 a discussion, is it --33 34 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, so the --35 THE COMMISSIONER -- between the LHD, the ministry and the 36 Commonwealth about the Commonwealth providing some money 37 for the state to run an aged care facility or the LHD to 38 run an aged care facility? Is that right? 39 40 41 PROFESSOR POTTER: The state. Yes, that's correct. So it is for the state to actually run it, for us to provide the 42 43 medical staff, the nursing staff, and for the Commonwealth 44 to transfer the funding to the state to allow us to employ 45 those people, and to also renovate that building because 46 it's an old building. That's the same model that we've asked them to consider. 47

1 2 So one of our hospitals currently is now full of patients waiting for aged care facilities, particularly 3 4 dementia disturbed patients, and we've said to the 5 Commonwealth, "Can we just get the funding that if that was in a nursing home in the Illawarra, can we get the funding 6 7 into the state and we will open the beds that we've lost at 8 part of our planning initiatives for new builds, for 9 example, in Shoalhaven, et cetera". So that's where we're 10 going with that. 11 I said there hadn't been 12 There has been some success. any great success with all of them, but the other group 13 spoke about the new policy from the Commonwealth about 14 you're only allowed to offer a place - relatives can only 15 16 refuse two places in the nursing home, and that's a new 17 policy from the Commonwealth. We wrote that policy with 18 them. 19 20 THE COMMISSIONER: So nothing's been decided yet. This is 21 still in discussion; correct? 22 PROFESSOR POTTER: 23 Absolutely, yes. 24 25 THE COMMISSIONER: Just another thing you said. Dr Waterhouse asked you to clarify some of the 26 conversations with the Commonwealth, and about whether that 27 28 's been done at the executive LHD level, and you said, this 29 is at 6229, 8: 30 We've been working closely with Margot --31 32 33 your chief executive --34 35 she's taken it up via the ministry, the 36 ministry have approached the Commonwealth, 37 and we've now got a series of workshop type meetings. 38 39 40 Are those workshop type meetings to discuss the thing that 41 we have just discussed? 42 PROFESSOR POTTER: It's to look at what can we 43 Yes. 44 possibly do different to what we're doing at the moment 45 that would alleviate the problem. 46 47 THE COMMISSIONER: And those workshop meetings involve

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1 people from the Commonwealth as well in those discussions? 2 3 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes. 4 5 THE COMMISSIONER: All right. Thank you. And they're 6 ongoing, are they? 7 8 PROFESSOR POTTER: They are. 9 10 THE COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you. That's what I wanted 11 to ask, thanks. 12 13 DR WATERHOUSE: Just developing that --14 THE COMMISSIONER: 15 Sorry, Mr Wakeling had his hand up. 16 17 DR WATERHOUSE: Yes, sorry. I'll come back to you, 18 Professor Potter. 19 20 But, Mr Wakeling, sorry, you've been waiting. Do you 21 want to say something? 22 Thank you, Commissioner, thank you 23 MR WAKELING: 24 Dr Waterhouse. Just a point, the question "What are the initiatives we're taking", and everyone responded in more, 25 26 more, more things. Of course, for the record, all 27 hospitals, including Illawarra Shoalhaven, are particularly 28 focused on creating efficiencies in the length of stay to open up the capacity. There's daily operational meetings 29 30 or, you know, four times a day, where we're really trying 31 to identify each little task of inefficiency that might 32 stack up to a few days of wait. 33 34 I hope today showcased just how complex the healthcare system is, in particular the aged care, because there are 35 36 increments of little delays that add up, and it is very hard, using appropriate project methodologies like Lean, to 37 try and nut out all those inefficiencies, but we are trying 38 39 our best, thank you. 40 41 THE COMMISSIONER: Don't take this the wrong way but we 42 have discovered the healthcare system is complex before 43 today, but you're certainly reinforcing it. 44 45 DR WATERHOUSE: Maybe if I could just go a little bit 46 further, actually, into that point while I have you, Mr Wakeling. So I appreciate the value of finding small 47

inefficiencies and resolving those so that you can be as
 efficient as possible, but obviously there are some fairly
 major inefficiencies, if you like, with some of what we've
 talked about this morning.

6 What would you like to see changed in relation to 7 something like the delays for the aged care? Obviously, 8 theres other things, we'll talk about those, too, but in 9 particular, also the delays with the NDIS patients, what 10 would you like to see done differently that would be big 11 savings in terms of efficiency, in your mind?

13 MR WAKELING: The most successful program that 14 Professor Potter spoke of that would get the most success 15 for us from an innovation perspective would be expanding 16 the aged care outreach service. That would make immediate 17 impact on reducing the demand to come in. That would be 18 within our LHD's control. I see a lot of the solutions from an external, outside of the LHD's perspective. 19 20 Fast-tracking the ACAT assessments that Rachael mentioned, 21 fast-tracking the access to those level 3/4 home care 22 packages which are currently, you know, six to 12 months is not ethically correct, and then opening up the ability of 23 the aged care beds. 24

Currently Illawarra has 122 waiting and the impacts 26 that we talked about, if they weren't there, we would have 27 28 nil impacts offloading ambulances, we would have nil 29 impacts of admissions in the emergency department. I am sure our hospital-acquired complication rate would go down, 30 31 and we probably wouldn't need as many services that we're 32 running in regards to Coledale Hospital, which is 33 a complete residential aged care facility. We could 34 repurpose it for something else and/or we could probably close it and save some funds. So that's all I'd like to 35 36 say, thank you.

38 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you.

40 Professor Potter, just on the points that you were 41 being asked about by the Commissioner, are you aware of 42 other states where they have been able to secure funding 43 for the state to run an aged care facility in the sort of 44 way you're talking about with the Commonwealth?

46 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, NSW Health actually has a facility
 47 at Garrawarra, which is, I think, South Eastern Sydney

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Local Health District, so - and that is specifically 1 2 running under that model where it's Commonwealth funding 3 but state run. I don't know the details of how the funding 4 model runs for that, and I know that there has been concern 5 because of the accreditation standards for aged care 6 facilities, particularly around dementia management, that 7 has made that whole model very challenging and it may even 8 But I suspect these are the sorts of things be in doubt. 9 that we're going to have to do. We're going to have to get 10 good at looking after this patient group in suitable accommodation, however we staff it and however we run it. 11 12 13 The problem is not going to go away. There is no cure 14 on the horizon for dementia and the numbers are getting So we need to do something. 15 bigger and bigger. So I am 16 aware of that model. I don't know the fine detail of how 17 the Commonwealth fund it or what the relationship status 18 is. 19 20 DR WATERHOUSE: With the outreach model that you have 21 running at the moment - Mr Wakeling said a moment ago that 22 it would be good to have it as a standing outreach service - does that mean it's sort of cobbled together just 23 24 prevailing on borrowing people at the moment, effectively 25 and it's not an ongoing thing? 26 27 PROFESSOR POTTER: No, this is a great thing again to 28 praise our chief executive. Even though the funding has 29 not come through, she has had promises that it will come through, so she said, "Put the staff on permanently." If 30 31 you put them on temporary, it won't work, it will fall 32 So we're running this, I think, at a loss at the over. 33 moment, but the benefits to the patients, the benefits in 34 building relationships at aged care facilities, is immense, 35 and I think we really truly could expand on that so it 36 wasn't just ED avoidance, it was supporting early discharge, it was supporting training nursing home staff in 37 how to manage this group. 38 39 40 I think that's a great model, it's having great 41 success. From what our other colleagues were saying, it's working in Wyong as well. I think we could go a lot 42 43 further with that model and really build our links with the 44 community and with our facilities and GPs which would be 45 a great starting point and could expand. 46 47 DR WATERHOUSE: Are there other things - I mean, you're,

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1 obviously, talking in the workshops about different things 2 that would work with the Commonwealth, but in an ideal 3 world, are there other things you would like to see as 4 solutions to some of the challenges we've discussed? 5 PROFESSOR POTTER: Yes, I think a very simple - well, 6 I say it's simple, I'm just a doctor, but I think a very 7 8 simple thing would be if we just look at how many patients 9 are sitting across our acute and sub-acute beds, that would 10 be being paid for by the Commonwealth, why can't they simply just transfer that funding to allow us to enact all 11 12 these other models that we're trying to do to make 13 everything else more efficient? 14 It seems to me we're charging a small amount of money 15 16 that's nothing like what it would cost, and yet where is 17 the money that would be paying for those 600 beds if they I feel as if there must be - there's lots 18 hadn't closed? 19 of innovative ideas that people come up with and we are 20 doing that, but if there was - we're sitting with a very 21 unfavourable bottom line with our relation with the 22 If we could get round that and fix that and ministry. 23 allow all the new ideas and the new models of care to come 24 out, I think that would give a sense of optimism and hope So that would be a thing I would like to 25 going forward. 26 see explored and, as I say, it's not my area of expertise, I'm sure it is very complicated, but I think that could be 27 28 something. 29 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. 30 31 32 Ms Hawkins, did you want to add anything in terms of 33 what you would like to see change? 34 I think it's more what people have touched on 35 MS HAWKINS: 36 in terms of community-based measures, in terms of 37 supporting our patients before they get to a point of crisis, or at a point of needing the acute care. I think 38 it would be more around service-based activities in the 39 40 community. 41 42 DR WATERHOUSE: Just one point I wanted to clarify, you mentioned earlier, and Mr Wakeling supported the point, 43 44 about the level 3/4 community care packages sometimes 45 waiting six to 12 months. How often do you see a person 46 deteriorate in that time such that they now do need an aged care facility and they cannot be managed at home? 47 Is that

1 a common phenomenon? 2 Frequently, yes, and I can comment that as 3 MS HAWKINS: 4 both a nurse unit manager and within a discharge planning phase where they're not geriatric-admitted patients, as 5 well as my aged care navigator role. 6 It is highly 7 frequent, yes. 8 9 DR WATERHOUSE: So that six to 12 months delay is actually 10 not just an inconvenience; it is actually resulting in a deterioration that means that they need a higher level of 11 care than they would have needed? 12 13 14 MS HAWKINS: Correct, and it's a twofold impact in terms of the impact and the stress that it's also causing the 15 16 family and also the demand that it's actually causing on 17 the hospital system. 18 19 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. 20 21 Ms Okulicz, what would you like to see given an ideal 22 world, apart from the health care worker back? 23 24 MS OKULICZ: For me personally and for Wyong, I'd like if there's a bed in the hospital, it should be funded. 25 I have 30 beds, fund the 30 beds, then I've got the staff to run 26 But then you would also be able to increase the allied 27 it. 28 health recruitment to actually be available for every bed. 29 Then we'd get proper referrals and proper reviews in a 30 timely manner to make decisions quicker and be able to move 31 people through, because our area is consistently being 32 developed. 33 34 There are more and more houses coming up. There is 35 nothing but growth happening in the Wyong area that we're going to need those beds if - there's no ifs and or butts. 36 and we haven't had aged care facility closures, we've 37 actually had more opening, but they just don't have 38 capacity and half of them don't have memory support units 39 40 either. So I say fund every bed that's available in Wyong 41 hospital and then look at increasing memory support units 42 for the Central Coast. 43 44 DR WATERHOUSE: What about the guardianship tribunal 45 aspect that you spoke of before? Are there ways that you 46 see that that could be streamlined and improved? 47

1 MS OKULICZ: If you had the allied health referrals 2 quickly, then we could get those reports sooner, so having 3 the allied health services available. But then looking at 4 the guardianship processes, like, why does it take three to 5 six weeks to get a hearing date? Could they not be expedited for somebody who is in hospital, looking at those 6 processes? I mean, ACAT already get expedited for in 7 8 hospital, so they are 48 hours KPI, but in the community 9 it's like six weeks. So can we look at things that are 10 prioritised for hospital patients to get them out and can 11 we streamline that process? 12 13 DR WATERHOUSE: Thank you. 14 If you had an ideal world, what would 15 Ms Pickering? 16 you like to see? 17 18 MS PICKERING: I think right care in the right place, and 19 I guess I'm coming from the community context of we know 20 that there's a lack of GPs and that's not an easy fix. We 21 have a number of non-admitted models of care in the 22 community that don't have - the medical governance sits with the GP, and often when we are unable to get hold of 23 24 a GP. then we don't have another avenue to go where we 25 think we might be able to actually avoid that hospital 26 presentation. 27 28 I touched on some of the linkages that we do have, but 29 those medical officers that I touched on before already have a workload as well, so I think linking some medical 30 31 support at an LHD level into the non-admitted models of 32 care in the community to really try and help prevent those 33 hospital presentations. 34 I also think we need to look at the hours of operation 35 36 of some of our community services, because, you know, for the vast majority of our community services we go down to 37 one or two staff over a weekend or public holidays, but 38 we're not seeing the reduction of the patients that are 39 40 needing our care in the community. So I think that's an 41 opportunity to really - and I guess out of hours, 42 I participate in on call out of hours, so I see some of the 43 presentations that are coming through, sort of after that 44 8.30 at night. There are some that are preventible that if 45 we had the services operating later into the evening, 46 potentially that would avoid some hospital presentations. 47

1 DR WATERHOUSE: Mr Shortis, from a community health point 2 of view what would you like to see? 3 4 MR SHORTIS: Similar to what has been said. With the 5 increasing complexity of people in the community I'd like to see more supports both pre and post hospital, so from 6 a medical point of view to avoid admissions, from a medical 7 8 point of view to get them out quicker, and from the 9 supports for the people living in the community to enable 10 them to function in the home, and stay in the home longer. 11 DR WATERHOUSE: 12 Commissioner, that concludes my questions. 13 14 THE COMMISSIONER: Can I just ask all six of you whether there's anything further of real importance that didn't get 15 16 raised today? 17 18 MS PICKERING: No. 19 20 MS OKULICZ: No. 21 22 THE COMMISSIONER: Anyone online? 23 PROFESSOR POTTER: 24 There was just one thing, sorry, I know One of the other things we mentioned 25 I'm talking too much. with the Commonwealth was we have level 1, 2, 3 and 4 26 packages. We asked could we look at level 5 packages, 27 28 could we look at something that's closer to an actual 29 residential aged care facility? And, again, we were willing to work with them to be the providers of that. 30 31 32 That's just another thought, that, you know, let's get 33 the packages timely but actually let's go above and beyond 34 so there's something between a level 4 and an aged care facility. 35 36 37 THE COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you. 38 39 Mr Chiu, was there anything? 40 41 MR CHIU: No questions, thank you. 42 43 THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you for that? 44 45 DR WATERHOUSE: I just, sorry --46 THE COMMISSIONER: Go ahead. 47

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We've had the benefit of your lyrical DR WATERHOUSE: brogue today, Professor Potter, but I have been asked by the stenographers if you could please state your name clearly for the purposes of the transcript. Okay, it's Clinical Professor Jan Potter, MS POTTER: P-O-T-T-E-R, as in Harry. THE COMMISSIONER: To all six of you, thank you very much for your time. We're very grateful for the assistance you have given the Inquiry. So thank you again. We will now adjourn and I'm told it's 2 o'clock on So we'll adjourn until 2 o'clock on Monday. Monday. Thank you all. <THE WITNESSES WITHDREW AT 1.28PM THE SPECIAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY WAS ADJOURNED TO MONDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2024 AT 2PM 

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