

Rehab haven under threat

TONY VERMEER

THE future of Sydney's major specialist rehabilitation hospital is under threat because of a reduction in NSW Government funding.

The 66-bed Royal Rehabilitation Centre at Ryde, which treats brain and spinal injury patients requiring long-term care, has been unable to sign contracts to begin construction of a new \$50 million facility because of financial uncertainty.

Work must begin by June this year to complete the new centre by 2014, as part of an \$82 million deal with a developer who is planning to build homes and community facilities on surplus land at the site.

Under the terms of the sale arrangement, parts of the cur-

rent hospital site must be also handed to the developer Frasers Property in three years.

But the hospital's CEO Stephen Lowndes told *The Sunday Telegraph* that NSW Health funding cuts and planning decisions had placed a cloud over the new hospital and the community facilities forming part of the redevelopment.

Funding for 30 of the hospital's general rehabilitation beds is being transferred to Ryde Hospital, where the NSW Government is building a replacement facility for the Graythwaite nursing home, which was sold off in 2009.

In addition, there has been "a significant reduction" in recurrent funding that has already led to staff cuts at the

hospital and NSW Health could, under existing agreements, cease funding for remaining specialty brain and spinal cord injury services with only 12 months notice, Mr Lowndes said.

He said the uncertainty meant it was impossible for the hospital's board to sign off on the new hospital, yet the Royal Rehab's existing building will be inoperable in three years.

"We face a situation where it would be ludicrous to build a new facility if we don't have the funding for the beds and a sustainable contract with NSW Health," he said. "We are an independent hospital organisation and the board has fiduciary responsibilities."

As well as spinal cord and brain injury patients, the cen-

tre's highly specialised programs help people with age-related illnesses, amputations, burns and stroke sufferers.

It also provides residential services for people with severe physical disabilities.

Mr Lowndes said no alternative solution for the on-going provision of statewide brain and spinal injury rehabilitation services had been proffered.



Royal Rehabilitation Centre