



# Forum shows gaps in candidate's care

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ROYAL Rehabilitation Centre in Ryde held a "Bennelong Health Forum" last week attended by politicians, the centre's directors and staff, doctors, allied health workers and other experts and representatives of the health field.

Liberal candidate for Bennelong John Alexander, Greens candidate Lindsay Peters and Bennelong Federal Labor MP Maxine McKew were all invited to outline their health policies.

However, Ms McKew was unable to attend and instead had a statement read out on her behalf.

The forum came after Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service cut funding to Royal Rehab by eight per cent, bringing the total cuts to \$12 million in the past two years and leaving the future of the hospital in jeopardy.

Royal Rehab CEO Stephen Lowndes said while the 80 attendees appreciated hearing the candidates' policies on health, the forum highlighted their lack of understanding about the complexities of the health system.

"Mr Peters and Mr Alexander were both honest and straightforward, but it wasn't possible for either of them to spell out how their policies would filter down to state and local levels," Mr Lowndes said.

There was disappointment that Ms

McKew was unable to attend, with so many staff facing an uncertain future and with cuts to services imminent.

Lyn Volzke, a staff member of the hospital, described the hospital restructure that would occur as a result of the funding cuts as "severe".

She said she was disappointed that Ms McKew kept pointing out what Labor had done for Ryde Hospital without acknowledging the situation at Royal Rehab just down the road.

"Our hospital has been here much longer than Ryde Hospital and Ryde Hospital is being propped up at our expense, such as the taking of our Dixon and Cars beds in the near future," Mrs Volzke said.

"With an aging population, I would have thought that we should not be sacrificed to make Ryde Hospital

look good, and because it is politically expedient. We should both be looked after."

Mr Lowndes also pointed out Ryde Hospital and said while securing funding there was important, Royal Rehab should not be overlooked.

"Disappointingly, I note Maxine's reference in her statement to having 'paid a lot of attention to Ryde Hospital, one of our oldest medical facilities but a much prized one'.

"It is sad to reflect, of course, that Royal Rehab has been providing public health services for considerably longer than Ryde Hospital and that Maxine has not been able to secure our future," he said.

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