

More public hospital cutbacks in Sydney's west

Chris Gordon, Socialist Equality Party candidate for Parramatta
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A leaked memo from a senior surgeon Mac Wyllie at Mt Druitt Hospital, in Sydney's west demonstrates yet again the dysfunctional state of the public hospital system.

The memo, which was made public earlier this month, revealed that the surgery network of the Sydney West Area Health Service (SWAHS) had overspent its budget by \$18 million, and that hospitals in the region were being called upon to make up the shortfall by cutting services.

Despite the fact that the working class areas of Sydney's west are heavily dependent on public hospitals for their health needs, hospital beds will be closed and surgery cancelled. At Mt Druitt hospital, the number of overnight beds will be reduced from 30 to 15 and the number of day beds from 16 to 10.

Richard Hanney, a surgeon at Mt Druitt hospital, warned that there "may well be the need for elective surgery to be cancelled because beds will be filled by the emergency patients."

Other hospitals will also be affected. Associate Professor Geoffrey Brooke-Cowden, director of surgery at Auburn Hospital, told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that operating room capacity at his hospital would be halved over January. Moreover, the large Westmead Hospital would be "virtually shutting their operating rooms down for six weeks."

David Dunn, head of surgery at Blacktown Hospital, likewise indicated a "Christmas slowdown" for about a month. He noted that while not always the case, the practice had not been "uncommon" in the past.

The state Labor government immediately went into damage control. NSW Health Minister Reba Meagher declared that nothing unusual was taking place. The reduction in activity, she said, was to allow doctors and nurses to take leave and carry out maintenance. In any

case, there was reduced demand over the holiday period.



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