

**Potential for Patients and Community Level Medical
Practitioners to Influence High Technology Healthcare:
Evidence from Perth, Western Australia**

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been presented for a degree at any other tertiary institution.

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Abstract

Evidence is presented from a Case Study of the Inquiry into King Edward Memorial Hospital, a tertiary level maternity hospital in Perth, Western Australia, that values of medical professionalism can be distorted and contribute to impaired standards of care. Moreover, it is argued that the managerial tools of clinical governance will be insufficient to remedy dysfunctional institutional care.

This thesis proposes that an augmented primary level doctor-patient relationship support a coordinating and advocacy role for general medical practitioners into the care and safety of their patients when those patients are admitted to hospitals under the care of medical specialists. A relationship between patients and primary level doctors willing to undertake such roles would reciprocally support the more personally involved relationship required. This relationship could expand to promote a more appropriate and sustainable use of medical technology.

Research in this thesis explores the adequacy of the primary level doctor-patient relationship in Perth to establish the individual level care of the type necessary to

breakdown the present fragmented nature of healthcare services. Healthcare consumers in focus groups were presented with hypothetical situations designed to illustrate aspects of healthcare by general medical practitioners. There was found minimal support for the concept of continuity of care unless co-payments were discarded and attendance was made convenient and timely.

A number of experienced general practitioners in Perth were also interviewed on their views of the fragmented nature of healthcare, and the degree to which primary level medical care could contribute to its improvement. They all supported the concept that continuity of care was important to primary level healthcare and thought that most of their older patients agreed with this concept. The research found a significant difference in the perceptions of patients and doctors that requires being resolved. Some Perth general practitioners aspire to more demanding professional roles that could include leadership in total patient care. However any hope for an expansive contribution by primary medical care in promoting a patient voice in the use of healthcare technology, including in tertiary level hospitals, is at present unlikely. This thesis makes suggestions into reforms and research that could lead to a redirected healthcare system based around the concept of personalised patient care.

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Acronyms

A I M S Accident and Incident Monitoring System

A M A Australian Medical Association

A M W A C Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee

B M A British Medical Association

B M J British Medical Journal

C A M Complementary and Alternative Medicine

C M A J Canadian Medical Association Journal

C S A Clinical Staff Association (at KEMH)

G C C T General Coordinated Care Trials (of chronic disease care in Australia)

G D P Gross Domestic Product

G P General Practitioner

G P F H General Practitioner Fund Holding (in the United Kingdom)

H M O Health Maintenance Organisation

I V F In-Vitro Fertilisation

J A M A Journal of the American Medical Association

K E M H King Edward Memorial Hospital

L O S Length of Stay (In hospital)

M B S Medical Benefit Schedule

M J A Medical Journal of Australia

M O R I Market and Opinion Research International

N H S National Health Service (in the United Kingdom)

O E C D Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

P B S Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule

Q A H C Quality in Australian HealthCare Study

R A N Z C O G Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and
Gynaecologists

U K United Kingdom

U S A United States of America

W A Western Australia

This work is dedicated to the memory of Doctor Michael Booth Ph. D., Senior Lecturer in the Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy at Murdoch University, who encouraged me to think.

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