

## The common language of HEALTH

George Bernard Shaw once remarked that the British and Americans were 'divided by a common language'. These incisive words came to mind during the political campaign leading up to our recent state elections. The 'common language' was the massive issue of health care.

In examining the policies of the three parties, it seemed to me that there was a great deal of overlap in their views. Further, there seems tacit agreement that it is inevitable that eventually a new major state hospital building will be required, probably on a 'green fields' site. Changes in technology would seem to preclude delivery of the best medical care without a building or buildings designed to maximise the benefits of advancing medical technology.

What was given less emphasis in the lead up to the election was that the effective functioning of a hospital, like any other organisation, is as much about personnel and corporate culture as it is about plant and equipment. To attract the best medical people to our state we have the advantage of our wonderful lifestyle, but this must be accompanied by a corporate climate that recognises that most who make the choice to work in a public hospital seek a well-resourced research environment and an efficient, supportive and appropriate management

structure. For many highly talented people their personal goals are as much about professional fulfilment as remuneration. (See Opinion, p. 46 this Issue.)

As the Royal Hobart Hospital is – and must remain – an accredited teaching hospital it is essential that we, as a community, seek to provide the best possible medical education and training for medical undergraduates. This is an issue that affects the whole of Tasmania; it is not merely about the needs of the state capital.

Some medical services must be centralised because of their very high costs. The best possible outcomes for patients will be compromised if we fall into the traditional, although surely by now, quaint and discredited parochialism that lobbies for impracticable duplication of services.

The funding of health will always be an issue, particularly as the baby boomers reach their later years. It is incumbent upon those in government to maximise the value of the health dollar and to not play the 'blame game' from either side of the federal-state funding divide. With an issue as fundamental as health a better way must be found.

Clearly, at the various levels of government there are, regarding this issue, great opportunities for co-operation rather than confrontation.

