

Toxic Heavy Metals Taskforce Tasmania

Media Conference

10am Parliament House Lawns

Wednesday 17th March, 2010

Toxics Group calls for sacking of Director of Health Poisons Investigation Flawed Again

The Toxics Heavy Metals Taskforce today have called on the Minister for Health Lara Giddings to sack Director of Health Dr Roscoe Taylor for failing to establish proper medical assessment procedures for review of Dr Andreas Ernst's diagnosis of heavy metal poisoning of several current and former residents of Rosebery.

Spokesperson for the Taskforce Kay Seltitzas today said:

"The Director of Health Dr Roscoe Taylor has failed to arrange for independent clinical specialists to assist with arrangements to conduct direct patient consultations for peer review of Dr Andreas Ernst's diagnosis of heavy metal poisoning. This failure flies in the face of all sound medical review practices and is indicative of a lack of serious intent to thoroughly assess diagnosis by an eminent and highly respected Tasmanian specialist.

In addition, no arrangements have been made with diagnosed residents for any consultations with clinical toxicologists with hands on experience with the full range of heavy metals applicable.

We can have no confidence in Dr Roscoe Taylor's continued oversight of this review process if it is not conducted with due diligence and patient consultations. **Dr Taylor has completely refused to raise the question that it is the exposure to complex mixtures of dangerous elements that is the main problem. At no stage has he raised this question in public despite the fact that we know he is well aware of this being a fundamental problem.**

Dr Taylor's recent announcement about reducing the notifiable blood lead level down to 10 micrograms per decilitre in line with NHMRC guidelines falls far short of the groundbreaking benchmark set by the WA Department of Health for an action level of 5 micrograms per decilitre for children. Martin Matison, Principal Toxicologist, Environmental Health Directorate, WA Department of Health made the following statement and this will be included in the WA Lead in the Home Brochure:

"In light of the NHMRC decision of August 2009 to recommend that "all Australians should have a blood lead level below 10 micrograms per decilitre" and that "all children's exposure to lead should be minimised", the Department of Health (DOH) has adopted the NHMRC recommendation that the general public should have a blood lead level below 10 micrograms per decilitre and also that there be an action level of 5 micrograms per decilitre for children of 5 years of age or younger. This action level is to trigger an investigation and/or advice relating to minimising exposure of young children to lead in the environment. Young children are more susceptible to the effects of lead and also tend to be the first members of the community that have a significant intake of environmental lead."

Our Taskforce has developed a set of "Proposals for Action" which will be forwarded to the newly established Technical Advisory Group meeting on the Rosebery poisoning issues in Hobart today" said Kay Seltitzas.

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