

Australia Dossier by Allen Douglas

Health care might kill you

Doctors charge that the grossly underfunded public health system is killing and maiming their patients.

In late March, Dr. Lindsay Gazal, a Sydney-based general practitioner, presented the results of a survey of 450 physicians on the status of public health care, which he had organized through *Australian Doctor* magazine. The survey found that more than 80% had had their patients turned away from public hospitals, and over half believed that the health system had harmed or killed their patients.

The survey caused a national uproar, and forced federal Health Minister Dr. Michael Wooldridge to launch an inquiry, saying, "I want to know who died, when they died, and under what circumstances they died."

Wooldridge shouldn't have far to look, because it is his own government which is killing people, through its savage budget cuts. In 1996, the federal government slashed the health budget by \$3.4 billion, followed by another \$1 billion cut in 1997; an estimated additional \$0.5 billion was cut during the 1996 state Premiers Conference, notwithstanding that the premiers have asked for an extra \$7.2 billion for health care over the next five years, for the nation's \$30 billion health system.

These horrific cuts, magnified by cuts on the state level, were taken, notwithstanding the results of a June 1995 federal study which estimated that 18,000 Australians died each year and that 50,000 suffered permanent disabilities, due to complications caused by their health care. The study estimated that at least *one-half* of all these incidents were avoidable.

The state of health care is illustrated in the following recent incidents, a mere handful of what is reported almost daily:

- A 6-year-old boy with a badly broken arm was sent on a four-day, 800 km trip to various rural hospitals in New South Wales, until he found one which could treat him. He found no doctors on duty, admissions desks closed, etc., at hospital after hospital.

- A 26-year-old woman died in Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane, and it was at least six hours until anyone noticed. Her parents called the hospital three times the day she died, but were told each time that she was "sleeping."

- The only three doctors in the mountain town of Corryong in rural Victoria packed up and left, after further savage cuts to the local hospital. The town's medical practice sees 350 patients a day, who will now have to drive 140 km over winding, often icy roads, to see a doctor.

- Canberra lawyer Fiona Tinto, who headed a national investigation into health care, charged that more than 300 people in the capital of Canberra alone were dying each year from "preventable incidents."

- A doctor in Victoria reported, "I had to sit with a young man with a cerebral hemorrhage and watch him die, because we couldn't get him into a [surgical] theater in time. He should have lived and no doubt he would have, had we operated."

The crisis is most acute in the state of Victoria, under Premier Jeff Kennett. Since Kennett took power in 1992, he has closed 1,400 beds, slashed 40,000 health sector jobs, and blown out waiting lists for surgical operations to 70,000. He will cut \$30 million more this year and will shut additional hospitals, notwithstanding that his own

Health Minister, Rob Knowles, recently charged that "the system is on the verge of collapse." Seven prominent doctors have recently quit Victorian hospitals. One of them, Dr. Graeme Brazenor, the Victorian chairman of the Australian Association of Surgeons, charged, "When I started in 1982, the public system in Australia meant you could get the best care in the world, but when I left in November 1996, it had deteriorated to Third World standards in Victoria, and it's still there."

Despite the horror stories, and soaring job actions by health care workers, only one political force in the country has dared expose the *reasons* for this carnage. In a pamphlet entitled "Australia's Health Care 'Reforms': A Nuremberg Crime Against Humanity," Lyndon LaRouche's associates in the Citizens Electoral Council trace the genesis of the health care "reforms" of downsizing, privatization, efficiency, etc. to studies conducted by Australian front groups of the Mont Pelerin Society of London, the chief economic warfare unit of the British Crown, which designed all of Iron Lady Margaret Thatcher's devastating "reforms" in the United Kingdom. The pamphlet, 20,000 copies of which are circulating around the country, shows that the federal and Victorian governments are dominated by members of Mont Pelerin's Australian fronts. Kennett, for instance, was installed in power by the chairman of the ANZ Bank, John Gough, a leader of Mont Pelerin's Institute for Public Affairs, which designed Victoria's "reforms." The pamphlet indicts Kennett et al. for looting the very flesh and blood of the citizenry to the advantage of the banks and other financial institutions, as the Nazis did in Germany. At Nuremberg, the pamphlet emphasizes, those found guilty for the crimes of "inadequate provision of surgical and medical services," were hanged.