

## Too valuable to lose

FINANCES are stretched, jobs are going and government programs are being axed. It is not a good time to ask for a pay rise.

Yet the one thing Tasmania cannot afford is more specialist **doctors** packing up and leaving the public health system, as some are threatening to do unless they get a better deal.

The consequences are too awful to contemplate.

Without capable, highly trained experts, there would be more delays for patients on surgery waiting lists and more people forced to travel to Melbourne for operations and treatment. The standard and range of services offered at Tasmania's major hospitals would slip to the level of regional district hospitals and, ultimately, more lives would be lost.

In a world where well trained specialists are in great demand, Tasmania is losing the race. Already some services are hampered by a shortage of skilled people. Specialists are paid less than in any other state. A first-year, level one salaried specialist in a public hospital earns about \$110,000. That might sound a lot to those on much smaller wages but it less than half the amount being paid to some of the Government's semi-redundant advisers and senior bureaucrats.

Besides, specialists are no ordinary workers. They operate under the most intense pressure. People's lives are in their hands and their expertise is invaluable. Tasmania must attract and retain the best possible specialist **doctors** if it has any aspiration to maintain first-rate health care.

The Government cannot expect them to stay here out of a sense of public duty or because the lifestyle is nice, not when they can earn far more in other nice places. If priorities must be reordered, so be it. There must be better ways to make savings in the enormous Health Department than by stinting on specialists.

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