



Doctor seeks better outcome at Calvary

By Peter Jean
 Health Reporter

Halving the size of the waiting room and scrapping the traditional triage categories are among Associate Professor Garry Wilkes's prescriptions for overhauling Calvary Hospital's emergency department.

Professor Wilkes believes that when he was appointed director of the northside emergency department a year ago, it was largely run by "fly-in, fly-out" locum specialists and on track to being incapable of dealing with growing patient numbers.

Professor Wilkes has recruited new, permanent staff and says the department's performance is improving and will only get better.

"I'd like to see an empty waiting room," he says.

"I'd like to see the point where every single person is seen within 30 minutes and I think that's achievable."

An emergency department report card issued by the ACT Government last week found that the proportion of patients seen within clinically recommended waiting times at the Calvary casualty department declined in the year to August.

Professor Wilkes has a simple

explanation for this: he ordered an end to the practice where a clerk was responsible for checking details of patient data entered by doctors into the emergency department computer system.

Doctors are now responsible for the time-consuming process of taking care of the files themselves but will soon be aided by the installation of the same system used at the Canberra Hospital.

Professor Wilkes hopes the new system and the use of mobile tablet computer devices will reduce the time doctors spend completing patient files, but says waiting times have already started to improve in the department.

Nobody enjoys waiting to be seen by a doctor and one of Professor Wilkes's ideas for improving the efficiency of the department is getting patients treated as quickly as possible.

Professor Wilkes says patients requiring urgent attention will always be dealt with immediately but there can be too much emphasis placed on re-ordering the queue based on which triage categories patients fall into.

"The amount of time you wait to be seen has no effect on your outcome," he says.

Professor Wilkes argues that it can be better to deal with patients in the order they arrive in order to get those with the most minor injuries or illnesses out of the department quickly.

In this spirit, Professor Wilkes would like to turn half of the existing waiting room into additional treatment rooms.

In order to free up more space for treatment he has also devised a mobile "plaster trolley" which can be wheeled around the department so that a dedicated plastering room is no longer required.

This will free up space for a children's room.

Other plans for the department include making same-day stress tests available to patients who have had cardiac scares and ensuring these patients can be seen promptly by their GPs after leaving the hospital.

Professor Wilkes says he is driven by a simple idea.

"What would I want as a patient?" He asked.



POSITIVE PROGNOSIS: Professor Garry Wilkes says waiting times have already started to improve in the hospital's emergency department