



Stanhope faces up to anger over ACT hospice sale

By Claire Low

Outraged community members took Chief Minister Jon Stanhope to task last night over the proposed privatisation of Clare Holland House.

Mr Stanhope and Little Company of Mary chairman Tom Brennan faced an agitated crowd, largely made up of palliative care volunteers.

The public meeting at Ainslie Football Club was the final stage in the ACT Government's public consultation process surrounding the proposal to buy Calvary Public Hospital from the Little Company of Mary for \$77 million and sell the company the palliative care facility, Clare Holland House, for \$9 million. And the public wasted no time in getting their final thoughts to Mr Stanhope and Mr Brennan.

They fired passionate questions to

both men and muttered their discontent when unsatisfied with some answers.

One woman demanded to know why Mr Stanhope found a question so hard to answer. Some audience members became too angry to wait for the microphone and leapt to their feet to speak.

Mr Stanhope was asked if the sale of Clare Holland House was to "sweeten the deal". He said it was not, but instead part of a "broader negotiation".

Asked if the ACT Government would consider splitting the sale of Calvary from the buying of Clare Holland House, he said the ACT Government would, but the Little Company of Mary would not.

Mr Brennan said the Little Company of Mary did not ask the hospice

be part of the transaction, the ACT Government did.

According to Mr Stanhope, the sale of the palliative care facility would not impact on the care offered. What would change overnight?

ACT Palliative Care Society patron, Shirley Sutton, said the difference was it would no longer be a community facility. The sale of the hospice would reduce the Government's control over palliative care. For it to be in private hands would be a "negative step".

ACT Palliative Care Society member, Peter O'Keefe, said the hospice was nearly unique in the world.

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CHEER: Supporters give Peter O'Keefe a standing ovation for his speech



EMOTIVE: Panel, from left, Tom Brennan, Jon Stanhope, Peter O'Keefe and Shirley Sutton.



Crowd anger at Stanhope

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Almost everywhere else, hospices were churches, businesses or charities.

"In 1995, Canberra opened a hospice. The community said dying should never be a matter of charity, churches or profit," he said. "We own our own hospice because we wanted it that way. And it's up for sale." To Mr Stanhope, he said, "It's our institution, Jon. Not yours. You haven't the right to sell what's ours."

He concluded his speech to a standing ovation.

According to audience members, far from things not changing, things had already changed. Staff and volunteers were "demoralised" and "upset" and

symbols of other religions such as Judaism and Buddhism had been removed. They wanted to know – as the status quo had appeared to work, why change?

Mr Stanhope restated his stance that things would not change. The palliative care service would go from being a fully-funded service in a Government building to a fully-funded service on private land.

And Mr Brennan promised the Little Company of Mary would invest in quality research and teaching in palliative care in Canberra should the sale go ahead.

Society president David Lawrence concluded by demanding consultation be extended so the community could better understand the complex issues involved.