



# Support for financial bypass of Calvary

By Ewa Kretowicz  
 Assembly Reporter

The ACT Government has ruled out compulsorily acquiring Calvary Hospital following the collapse of its \$77 million buy-out offer but may build a new northside public hospital.

Little Company of Mary Health Care, which owns and operates the hospital on behalf of the ACT Government, withdrew from talks to sell the hospital to the Government citing long delays for Vatican approval.

The key argument for the proposed purchase of Calvary from the Little Company of Mary was financial.

Health Minister Katy Gallagher said the hospital needed a \$200 million capital investment.

"I don't know how to ensure that our budget can meet the financial challenges under the status quo.

"The status quo means we would need to spend around \$30 million a

year coming straight off our operating result. When you look at what we did in last year's budget our new expenditure didn't even come near \$30 million," Ms Gallagher said.

She said the new lease agreement would have to be creative but no decisions had been made.

"At the moment the lease arrangements are very tight. Any investment on that site transfers to an asset of [Little Company of Mary]," she said.

"From a financial point a view a third hospital would be the easiest way forward . . . but from a health service delivery point of view the Calvary site is by far the site that we would prefer to invest in . . . and it would certainly mean the death of Calvary public hospital and I'm not sure if the people of Canberra would see that as the best outcome."

Branch secretary of the ACT Australian Nursing Association Jenny Miragaya said a new public hospital

was the best solution. "[Calvary] would then be free to develop the current Bruce campus as a purely private facility free from the difficulties associated with the collocated public and private hospitals which have been highlighted by the ACT Auditor-General . . . and by [Ms Gallagher]," Ms Miragaya said.

But Greens MLA Amanda Bresnan said ACT taxpayers should own Calvary. "The Greens have discussed compulsory acquisition with the Chief Solicitor and former head of ACT Health and believe it is legally possible," Ms Bresnan said.

Ms Gallagher said the idea was crazy and blamed a lack of Liberal and Green support for the deal's collapse.

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## ANALYSIS



“The political and religious wounds will resonate for weeks or months, but what Canberrans ought to be concerned

about is what this means for the future of public health services offered at Calvary.”

■ Full report

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"People in the ACT have been denied a say in the management and operation of their public hospital. The assembly has not stood up for the people of the ACT; they have not stood up as a unified force and that has helped derail this project.

"I will take responsibility for some of this . . . but every single member in the assembly has to stand up and take some responsibility," Ms Gallagher said.

Little Company of Mary Health Care chairman Tom Brennan said the company's decision was not political.

"This decision is one that is purely to do with church deliberation; it has nothing at all to do with politics in the ACT," Mr Brennan

said. The opposition of Canberra and Goulburn Archbishop Mark Coleridge scuttled the plans.

"Our advice is that if the proposal was supported by the local archbishop then while there would be an approval process, it would move through the approval process relatively quickly," Mr Brennan said.

He said the sisters had withdrawn from the sale after it was made clear to them by the archbishop that any deal to sell the hospital would likely meet significant delays.

But Archbishop Coleridge said he expected a decision from Rome within months.

"I don't know where this stuff of years has come from. It hasn't come from me. I wrote that this would not be a quick-fire process . . . it's more a matter of months than years," Archbishop Coleridge said.