



Chairman warns on clinging to Calvary

By Graham Downie

Failure to sell Calvary Hospital to the ACT Government would likely lead to the collapse of Calvary public and private hospitals at Bruce within a year or two, the Little Company of Mary Health Care chairman Tom Brennan said.

The Government had indicated it would build a third public hospital if negotiations to buy Calvary Hospital from the company collapsed.

"That would mean Calvary Public Hospital would cease to be funded by the Government," Mr Brennan said.

"That would lead to the collapse of that particular mission. It would also lead, one would think, to the collapse of the private hospital in Bruce very quickly. We would be looking at closing both hospitals in Bruce within a year or two, one would think."

At the very least, if the hospital was not sold, the Government had indicated it would seriously consider whether further investments would occur at Calvary Hospital.

An option for the Government, if it did not buy the hospital, would be to provide all major upgrades at Canberra Hospital, with a subsequent downgrading of service in north Canberra.

On balance, the Little Company of



SALE PLEA: Little Company of Mary Health Care chairman Tom Brennan.

Mary had concluded it should sell the hospital for public benefit reasons.

But also, it was not prudent for the company to take the risks involved in retaining the hospital.

The agreement in principle with the Government provided for completion of the sale by June 30, 2010.

"If we are to achieve that, we are going to need a decision by February at the latest," Mr Brennan said.

"Frankly, I don't think we can allow it to drag on beyond that."

If no agreement had been reached by then, the Government would look at its other options.

Mr Brennan said this would be the worst of all possible outcomes.

The decision on whether to sell the hospital would be made by the Australian Province of the Little Company of Mary within the next two months.

Mr Brennan said if Calvary Hospital was sold, there would be no lessening of spiritual support.

"One of the hidden treasures of the ACT public hospital system is the pastoral care service the Government delivers at Canberra Hospital," he said.

"It is as good as you would get in any public hospital, church or government, anywhere in Australia."

Mr Brennan said one of the first concerns raised by Health Minister Katy Gallagher with him had been that all of the pastoral care at Calvary Hospital would continue.

As part of the agreement in principle to sell Calvary Hospital, the Little Company of Mary would buy Canberra's hospice, Clare Holland House, which the company already operates.

A spokesman for Supporters of Clare Holland House Young and Old Raff Poidomani said the group was concerned privatisation would result in deterioration of palliative care and of the imposition of Catholic values on patients of the hospice.

Mr Brennan said some proceeds from the sale of the Calvary Hospital would be invested in long-term enhancements of clinical training and research in palliative care in Canberra. Otherwise, no change in the service at the hospice was anticipated. Also as part of the agreement, the Little Company of Mary would build a new private hospital at Bruce.