



Flaws in Calvary phone poll reveal holes in quest for truth

A phone poll on the sale of Calvary Hospital conducted on the evening of Friday, October 23, contained several misleading questions. The questionnaire betrays a very flawed understanding of the current situation, in that it frames the questions in terms of a conflict of interests between the Government and the Catholic Church.

In fact, the Minister for Health, Katy Gallagher, is offering the public a choice between another government-run hospital, or the status quo, which is Calvary Hospital run by a partnership between the government and the Catholic Church. This partnership has been running for 30 years without any complaints by the Government – as confirmed by Gallagher herself.

The poll question that reveals the ignorance of the pollsters on this issue is as follows: “Who would you rather own and operate a public hospital, the Government or the Catholic Church?”

This question is invalid. This choice is not being offered to ACT citizens. It should have said: “Who would you rather own and operate a public hospital, the Government alone or the Government in partnership with the Catholic Church (as is the status quo)?”

Another question asked who should have the final say on the sale of Calvary Hospital, and the supposed answers to this question were “the Government”, “the owners”, “the Catholic Church” or “the community”.

Considering that this is a matter of breaking a 100-year contract and dissolving a partnership between the Government and the owners, no single one of these answers can be legitimate.

This poll can have no validity and should be rerun with sensible questions, or else dismissed as the nonsense it is.

Rita Joseph, Hackett

Like Allan Hewlett (Letters, October 25) I was recently asked to take part in a survey about the sale of Calvary Hospital. I answered the question about age, and then, after moving on to one about religion, was inexplicably told that my age group was full.

If so, why not terminate the interview after I answered that earlier age question? I'd like to know who is doing this survey, and why, and whether answering the wrong way about your religion excludes one from the survey.

Roy Darling, Florey

Allan Hewlett should not feel put out by not being asked to continue with a survey about the sale of Calvary Hospital because he answered “none” when asked his religion.

It appears that those conducting the survey wanted to get a cross-section of the community as a whole. After deciding how many people to interview they would probably have sought to interview an equal or near equal number of men and women as well as a certain number of people in different age ranges and across a large number of post codes. They may also have been interested in finding out if religious affiliation was of any importance in determining attitude, and not just the opinions of Catholics but those of other religions and of no religion as well.

When Hewlett agreed to do the

survey the interviewer may not have reached the quota for males. Similarly the quotas for his age group and post code may not have been reached but the quota for no religion/atheist/agnostic, etc, may have been full. If enough people in his age range had already done the survey, the interviewer would probably have stopped at that point and would not have needed to ask about his post code or his religion.

If interviewers only question whoever first answers the phone, the outcome would be distorted. The largest age/sex category to answer the phone at home are older women; those least likely to answer are younger men.

The initial questions asked of Hewlett would have assisted in obtaining a more accurate snapshot of the community.

Adam Browne, Lyons

After his exclusion from a phone survey, Allan Hewlett asks “What type of survey excludes respondents based on their religion or lack of religious beliefs?” The reason given by his interviewer for not needing to bother him further suggests one possible answer: a survey stratified by religious belief (or lack thereof) in which samples of the appropriate sizes have already been obtained for some of the strata. Such stratification ensures each stratum makes up precisely the same proportion of respondents to the survey as it does of the entire population being sampled.

David Wilson, Braddon