

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday 1 October, 2020

Peak body slams ageism in public health system

COTA SA condemns suggestions from a senior health bureaucrat that older people shouldn't be operated on, calling it sickening and inhumane.

An email from an SA Health program manager, reported by the ABC last night, asked public hospital surgeons to encourage GPs not to refer older people or those with multiple conditions for surgery.

COTA SA chief executive, Jane Mussared, said the bureaucrat's comments demonstrated how ageism was entrenched across government and society.

"Instead of celebrating the lives of older people today, the International Day of Older Persons, we're having to defend their rights to equal access to health care," Ms Mussared said.

"To suggest to GPs that it is 'not in their best interest' to refer older patients is sick and immoral.

"Access to health care should be a life membership, not a season ticket with an arbitrary expiry date.

"The public health system exists to support and care for all South Australians.

"We expect zero tolerance of ageism, everywhere, and especially in the public sector."

Ms Mussared said ageism, according to increasingly available evidence and anecdotes, was rife in the state's health system.

Evidence given at last year's SA Select Committee on Health Services suggested that paramedics were advised to wrap a 94-year-old dementia patient with an acute hip fracture in towels, should they need to soil themselves, because paramedics were unable to move them.

"Ageism leads to unacceptable outcomes for older people who seek medical help and it undermines trust in our health system," Ms Mussared said.

"Need, risk and contribution to quality of life should form the basis of decision-making about access to health service – never age."

While often unwitting and subconscious, Ms Mussared said too often ageism goes unchallenged.

“We salute the GPs and surgeons who objected to this SA Health employees’ emails and called out the ageism,” she said.

“We urge others to do the same every time they see and hear it, whether that’s in health, in aged care, at work or even the supermarket.

“Let’s mark the 30th anniversary of International Day of Older Persons by rejecting ageism wherever we find it.”

COTA SA is an older people’s movement and the peak body representing the rights, interests and futures of more than 633,000 older South Australians aged over 50.

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