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Doctors call for review of digital health care system

Doctors have called for an independent review of the integrated electronic medical record (ieMR) system being rolled out across Queensland Health.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) President Dr Chris Perry said there was concern amongst doctors the digital transformation of the health system was being rushed and the software was difficult to adapt to local needs.

“Given clinician concerns over impacts on patient safety and productivity, it is important for the government to clearly outline a roadmap for the future of the ieMR,” Dr Perry said.

Dr Perry said AMA Queensland was supportive of digitising the state’s public hospital and health services because it believed e-health had great potential to deliver improved real time information and patient care.

“However, more than \$1.2 billion has been spent on the roll out to date, so it’s vital we ensure a successful digital health solution at the end of this process,” he said.

AMA Queensland is seeking a review by a team of experts in the fields of information technology, database integrity, clinical informatics, human factors and incident investigation.

“We need a detailed assessment on the impacts on patient safety and hospital productivity, looking at how fit for purpose some of the software components have been and the degree to which the ieMR rollout has affected waiting times in Emergency Departments and for elective surgeries,” Dr Perry said.

There had been reports of random or intermittent glitches that prevented operations notes for patients from displaying as well as dates being inexplicably discordant with outpatient records and lab results being displayed incorrectly for a patient.

“These issues have serious potential to impact the quality of data available to guide clinical and administrative decisions in hospitals and need to be thoroughly assessed and addressed,” Dr Perry said.

“In addition, it’s vital to develop guidelines for any future investment, procurement and governance of digital systems based on this experience.

“Issues such as whether a single domain with a Brisbane-based server offers adequate resilience and flexibility in a geographically disparate state like Queensland should be considered, along with the adequacy of current patient privacy, confidentiality and security controls.”

“AMA Queensland will continue to work with Queensland Health as it digitises the state’s public hospitals and health facilities,” Dr Perry said.

“However, we will also advocate for doctors to make sure they maintain their ability to deliver high quality health care to Queenslanders.”

MEDIA CONTACTS: Chiara Lesèvre, AMA Queensland – 0419 735 641; Fran Metcalf, Sequel PR - 0417 627 867.