



## ***Media Statement***

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Tuesday, 9 August 2011

### **No evidence of a cancer cluster at Royal Perth Hospital**

**A study into the use of phenol-based cleaning products at Royal Perth Hospital (RPH) has found no evidence of a cancer cluster among its Patient Support Service (PSS) staff.**

Dr Paul Mark, Area Director Clinical Services for South Metropolitan Area Health Service, said while the study found 213 support staff were diagnosed with cancer over the 25-year period, the rate was similar to that found in the general Perth population.

“The risk of cancer was no higher than that of the Perth metropolitan population. The number and types of cancers diagnosed were similar to those in the Perth population,” he said.

The prevalence of cancer in the general community is high with 1 in 3 men and 1 in 4 women up to the age of 75-years likely to be diagnosed with cancer.

While the risk of cancer deaths was statistically similar to that of the Perth metropolitan population, the risk of death from cancer and conditions other than cancer were higher with longer duration of PSS employment and among male PSS staff. However, the increase in deaths from a broad range of diseases is unlikely to be the result of exposure to a single workplace hazard such as phenol-based cleaners.

Although the primary focus of the study was on cancer, it did identify a link between exposure to phenol-based cleaners and some respiratory illnesses and possibly skin conditions other than skin cancer.

Royal Perth Hospital stopped using phenol-based products in August 2009 and PSS now use a chemical cleaner commonly used in hospitals throughout Australia.

Dr Mark said the health and wellbeing of hospital staff remained a priority and he hoped the report provided them with some reassurance.

“We have enhanced our chemical training programs to ensure all staff have the necessary information, skills, knowledge and protective equipment to safely manage chemical cleaning agents within the hospital,” he said.

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Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**  
South Metropolitan Area Health Service



**Royal Perth  
Hospital**

The Department of Health's Epidemiology Branch study, which was overseen by independent cancer researcher Professor Bruce Armstrong, started in November 2009 following concerns that a number of support staff at RPH had developed cancer and other health related problems.

Records from more than 3,200 former and current support staff employed at RPH between 1983 and 2008 were included in the study.

The full report is available at <http://www.health.wa.gov.au/publications>

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