The Hon. Jillian Skinner MP
Minister for Health & Minister for Medical Research

Speech to the Justice Health 2011
Annual General Meeting

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(E&OE)

Acknowledging Traditional Owners

Good afternoon everyone and thank you to the Honourable Patricia Staunton and Julie Babineau for your kind welcome.

It is a great pleasure to be here.

When I became Minister for Health I made several fundamental commitments to the people of NSW.

I said that, “Every decision and every person working in the health system must be focused on the patient”.

I also made a commitment to focus on improving access to timely, quality health care that keeps people healthy and avoids unnecessary hospitalisation.

Today is about achievements over 2010/11 and I am delighted that Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network can already point to real achievements against these priorities.

I would like to make special mention of the work undertaken to improve patient care through the establishment of the Forensic Mental Health Network.
The Forensic Mental Health Network has enhanced many important linkages established between inpatient services and services provided in the community to ensure the best possible patient care is provided to forensic patients.

This is a significant achievement given the new ways of working and collaborating that is required to safely and effectively bring together inpatient units from four different health services.

Importantly, the Forensic Mental Health Network provides NSW with the majority of the components required for a comprehensive system of care for forensic patients.

Most of you would be aware that it has been a long journey to get to this and I congratulate you on that achievement.

Another effort that highlights the attention Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network have given to improving the accessibility and quality of health services is the Care Navigation Support Program.

I am delighted with the efforts of the Care Navigation Support Program in building the capacity of Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network to ensure patients, particularly patients with chronic disease, get the care they need.

As many of you would be aware, this program aims to support the patient journey and facilitate release planning activities to ensure a smooth transition to community health care providers.

The Care Navigation Support Program is a great example of the efforts that Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network undertake to adapt state-wide programs to unique patient populations.

Although still an evolving program, the Care Navigation Support Program has a critical mandate to ensure a continuum of coordinated care from entry into the custodial system to the community and draws on a range of strategies to achieve this including shared care planning, health coaching and discharge planning.
This is particularly important not only to ensure comprehensive health care but to provide an avenue for patients leaving custody to engage with community service providers and stay out of hospital.

Since its commencement in April 2011 and 30 June 2011, the Care Navigation Support Program enrolled over 400 patients including 80 Aboriginal patients.

Of the patients enrolled in the program during this period, 46 had shared care plans developed with community service providers to ensure a seamless transition from prison.

Another example of the efforts undertaken to put the patient at the centre of decision-making is the implementation of the Hepatitis C Nurse Led Model of Care.

As many of you would be aware, Hepatitis C infection is common amongst NSW prisoners with 44% prevalence. In previous years, the model of service deliver for hepatitis treatment in custody was reliant on specialist Visiting Medical Officers and nurses with advance skills in assessment and treatment of patients with chronic Hepatitis C.

This required patients to be transferred between Correctional Centres to receive treatment. Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network have introduced a new model of care that involved nursing staff taking the lead in providing treatment to patients with Hepatitis C with support and advice from medical specialists.

This process removed the need for patients to travel between Correctional Centres and has resulted in 95 new patients commencing treatment in 2010/11.

Another initiative that puts the patient at the centre of decision-making is the Aboriginal Chronic Care Program.

This is a cultural appropriate program that provides specific interventions and care for Aboriginal people within the criminal justice system. The program is currently operating in 17 sites across NSW. During 2010/11 the program expanded to now cover over 50% of Aboriginal people in custody.
This expansion resulted in 850 new enrolments in the program which increased the average number of participants to 1,100 at any one time.

Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network also delivered timely, quality services via the Statewide Community and Court Liaison Service.

This service assists Magistrates, Solicitors and prosecutors at local courts with diversion of people with mental health problems and disorders by referring clients to appropriate mental health services in the community and hospital settings.

The court liaison service is now operational in 21 local courts throughout NSW. In 2010/11 there were 2066 patients before the courts who were assessed and 1637 referred to treatment away from custody.

A similar program also operates in the juvenile setting. In 2010/11 there were 407 young people diverted away from custody and into treatment in the community.

Clearly, there are many more achievements over the last 12 months and I am sure many of these will be outlined in the Year in Review address by the Chief Executive of Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network, Julie Babineau.

However, given today is about recognition, I would like to make special mention of the outstanding level of recognition Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network have received through recently announced awards.

Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network were awarded several major NSW awards in 2011 including at the NSW Premiers Awards, the NSW Health Awards, the Mind Matters Awards and the Crime Prevention Awards for projects as diverse as the Care and Management of Pregnant Women in Custody, Treating Hep C, research into mental illness, Adolescent Health Aboriginal Services and the delivery of post release services.

Special congratulations should go to the staff involved in the Care and Management of Pregnant Women in Custody which involved collaboration between Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network, Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health
District and Corrective Services NSW. This project received the Director General’s innovation award at the NSW Health Awards and a Premiers Award this year.

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, clearly there are a range of important reforms underway across the health sector that will result in new governance arrangements and devolved decision-making.

It is important to acknowledge that the delivery of health services in any environment is a complex business and the reforms underway are intended to better support front-line staff to provide patient care.

However, having taken the opportunity to become familiar with Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network since I became Minister for Health, I understand that the work undertaken by this organisation is amongst the most complex in the health sector.

I understand efforts are already underway to ensure Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network establish relationships and collaborate with Local Health Districts, the Pillars, the NSW Ministry of Health, the Attorney General’s Department, the Mental Health Review Tribunal and other parts of the broader health system.

However, to put the next phase of development of the organisation in context I believe it is important to reflect on the history of Justice Health.

Outstanding efforts have been made by the Justice Health Board and staff past and present, to develop from a health service model that delivered basic care, to a comprehensive health service that ensures all patients in contact with the criminal justice system are screened and provided with health care services equivalent to those available in the community.

Clearly the sophistication and range of health services provided by Justice Health has grown significantly. This is a credit to the ability of all Justice Health staff to provide sound and compassionate care that delivers positive patient outcomes.
It is also a testament to your ability to convince those that you work with, your key partners, that health services are an essential component of the rehabilitative endeavour and that they should be continued when people leave custody and re-enter the community.

Finally the current sophisticated health service model is also an outcome of Justice Health being firmly entrenched as part of the NSW Health and subject and accountable to the policy frameworks and strategic priorities of the health sector.

The history of Justice Health also shows that the success of the organisation depends on strong relationships with Corrective Services NSW and NSW Department of Juvenile Justice as well as health services in the community.

I am aware of the effective and cohesive nature of the relationship Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network continue to have with these key partners and look forward to these strong relationships continuing as more major reforms across the health sector are implemented.

In closing, I would like to say that all the efforts of Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network over the last 12 months are recognised and appreciated.

It is true that Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network do not receive the public accolades or acknowledgements that many other parts of the health system receive.

However, in a complex environment with vulnerable patients with high levels of need, Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network deliver incredibly well. I look forward to seeing the achievements of the next 12 months.

Lastly, I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Justice Health Board for their work. Thank you especially to the Honourable Patricia Staunton for her contribution as the Chair.

Thank you for inviting me to your AGM today.