

20 July 1982

PRESS STATEMENTAnn Hercus  
Shadow Minister of Health

## South Island Mobile Xray Unit

The Minister's announcement that the South Island's only mobile chest xray unit has been ditched, was sharply criticized by Ann Hercus, Shadow Minister of Health.

"He has axed our unit - and for the most flimsy inadequate illogical reasons. These are:

- the Minister claims there is a health risk from radiation exposure. If that is so (and my information is that it is not) then the Minister must be logical and close down the 4 units in the North Island as well, not just the one in the South.
- the Minister claims the small size of the mobile Xray picture lacks fine precision of diagnosis. If that is a valid reason, then he must close down all 5 units, and not just one.
- the Minister claims the South Island unit is a waste of resources. Given that it is, as a chest unit, as productive and efficient as the 4 in the North Island, then he must in logic cut the others as well, if his claim is correct.
- the Minister claims the South Island unit picks up less TB than the North Island units. That is correct. It doesn't seem to have occurred to the Minister that the reason for this is there is a higher TB incidence in the North. Further, the unit is not a TB unit, it is a General Chest Unit.

- the Minister admits the unit picks up large numbers of lung cancer and enlarged hearts, but says people should go to their doctors. The blunt fact is that many can't afford to wander to their doctors for a casual checkup. The visible presence of the unit in communities has enabled disabling diseases to be discovered, which may have gone undetected for years - particularly in industrial complexes and isolated rural communities, and for people who just haven't got \$10-12 for a GP visit. Further, if "people should go to their doctor" by Ministerial decree in the South Island, then the same rule should apply to the North Islanders.

The problem with all the Minister's arguments for axing the South Island unit is that (if they are valid) they are equally arguments for axing all the North Island units, as well!

Yet the Minister has turned his slasher only on the South Island, in what must only be an act of blatant discrimination.

The cost of keeping the South Island unit is \$50,000 a year - only 6 cents per South Island adult per year. Unless the Minister can come up with some less flimsy and illogical arguments than he has done so far, I suggest that the Minister be told to keep his axe away from the only South Island Mobile Chest Xray Unit.

The Minister of Health made a sensible decision in deciding not to continue with imposing a standard charge on prescriptions. He now has a chance to come to a decision which doesn't blatantly discriminate against the South Island."