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## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **St Vincent's Hospital Response to Final Report on Off-Protocol Prescribing Inquiry**

St Vincent's Hospital Sydney accepts the findings of NSW Health's final report into the off-protocol prescription of chemotherapy to a group of head and neck cancer patients at the hospital and is fully committed to implementing the report's recommendations.

The Chief Executive Officer of St Vincent's Health Australia, Toby Hall, said St Vincent's apologises – deeply and unreservedly – to the patients and families affected by this matter and to all their cancer patients.

“Quite clearly we have failed to meet the high standards we set ourselves,” Mr Hall said.

“The public statements we made at the time were made with the best of intentions, using the information we had on hand at that stage,” he added.

“Clearly, the processes followed in managing this issue failed us. We made mistakes and the statements we released turned out to be inaccurate.

“But at no stage did the Hospital set out to deceive.

“I personally raised this matter with the head of the Inquiry and asked if he had any evidence to suggest that hospital staff had intentionally misled the public. And he responded that he had no such evidence.”

Mr Hall said the Hospital acknowledged the distress experienced by patients and families and the unnecessary anxiety it has caused them.

“Once again, we say to them: we are deeply sorry for letting you down in this way,” he said.

“In terms of the additional patients put forward by the final report, we have already begun a process of open disclosure which includes apologising and offering support.

“It's an apology we share with the broader public, who rightfully have high expectations of an institution such as St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, which has been caring for the sick for the past 160 years.”

Mr Hall said that since the Inquiry's interim report in April, St Vincent's had focussed on implementing its recommendations, both those that relate directly to the hospital's operations along with others of a general nature.

He said the hospital's process of implementation has been independently supervised by Professor Robert Thomas, Chief Advisor on Cancer to the Victorian Government and one of Australia's most respected cancer experts.

Professor Thomas has endorsed the hospital's efforts, judging St Vincent's to have completed 10 of the report's recommendations, while another three are either 'ongoing' or 'in progress'.

These recommendations include delivering personal apologies to patients and their families, an intensive follow-up with patients to check on their health, and revisiting mechanisms for escalation of clinical concerns to ensure key staff – including nurses and pharmacists – are included.

As well, Mr Hall said, the hospital had put in place a world-standard cancer electronic medical record and prescribing system that updated new dosage protocols. Under the system, if any clinician wants to prescribe medication outside the guidelines they must submit their request for peer review and explain their reasoning. There are also regular clinical audits to ensure this is occurring.

Already, cancer patients at St Vincent's are treated and overseen by a multi-disciplinary team as per the review's statewide recommendations.

In his independent assessment of progress, Professor Thomas said: "Since April, I have been working with St Vincent's Hospital Sydney as they implement the recommendations of the interim report. My role has been to provide independent oversight of the implementation and provide public reports on progress at three, six and 12 month milestones.

"I believe the hospital has made significant progress in addressing the recommendations of the Inquiry's interim report and restoring public confidence in its cancer treatment services."

Mr Hall said St Vincent's had embraced the process of implementation as an opportunity to make improvements to its systems, processes and culture in the clinical areas involved in the issue.

"With the release of today's final report, St Vincent's will immediately begin implementing the additional recommendations relating to the hospital, as well as continuing its ongoing efforts of improvement and cultural change," he said.

"As difficult as this process has been, I believe the hospital – and the broader St Vincent's Health organisation – will come out of it stronger.

"There is no question that this is just the beginning of a long-term effort by the hospital to make amends and restore public confidence and trust."

**Media contact: David Faktor 0405 497 510**