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First GP and Practice Nurse touch down in NT

Yesterday (8 July), Tasmanian GP and Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) board member Dr Emil Djakic and general practice nurse Sharon Brain were the first visiting health professionals to arrive in the NT as part of the Federal Government's Emergency Response Plan to tackle child abuse in Indigenous communities.

A GP of 12 years Dr Djakic said today will involve important cultural awareness training in Alice Springs before heading to the more remote communities tomorrow.

"Obviously conducting child health checks in these communities will require sensitivity. Knowing what is and isn't appropriate is essential.

"I have worked with remote Aboriginal communities in the past and understand the significant cultural differences. Working with community elders and leaders and explaining what the checks involve and the processes surrounding these will be integral to the success we have here," Dr Djakic said.

In 1995 Dr Emil Djakic spent 12 months employed as a Regional Medical Officer which allowed him to travel with the Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) across the Tanami Desert. During this time he had the opportunity to work in the Aboriginal communities of Mullen, Billaluna and Balgo hills.

Dr Djakic said his decision to go to the Territory was more than just about eliminating child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities.

"Aborigines in this country have a life expectancy that is 17 years less than the rest of the population.

"Providing health checks to the children in Aboriginal communities is an important step in turning this statistic around.

"Having ongoing accessible health services that involve a team of professionals such as dietitians, psychologists, nurses, Aboriginal health workers and counsellors will provide education and good health to empower to these communities.

"Having general practice nurse Sharon Brain here in the NT highlights the importance of a team based approach to health care. Her valuable skills will allow her to perform a range of administrative and clinical duties including administering injections such as immunisations," Dr Djakic said.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs who will arrive in Alice Springs on Friday said every professional has their own personal reasons for leaving their communities but all have the same agenda.

"We are all very committed to engaging with the communities and their leaders and the range of government agencies present to improve Aboriginal children's health.

"We have all had varying amounts of experience working with Aboriginal communities and believe heading to the NT for a minimum period of two weeks is the right thing to do," Dr Hobbs said.

For more information please phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell on 0415 662 266