

Rec 28/10/16

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Po Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Please find my submission to the Inquiry into the Conduct and Related Matters of the 2016 Federal Election.

1. I am a part time Consultant Neurologist and Deputy Director of Physician Education (DDPE) at the Townsville Hospital (TTH). I have been in these positions since February 2016.

2. As part of my DDPE role I am responsible for organising the FRACP clinical exam which was held on 25th July 2016 at the Townsville Hospital. On the 23rd July, during telephone discussions about examination preparation with Dr Raguharan Kathiresu I was advised of patients admitted to TTH, who had not been afforded their right to vote in the Federal Election held of July 2nd 2016.

3. The facts reported to me during the telephone discussion are that Dr Kathiresu was on call and covering the Sub Acute Care Unit (SACU) at The Townsville Hospital. This unit has 39 inpatients who are typically long stay patients for purposes of slow rehabilitation. On July 2, Dr Kathiresu completed his rostered shift from 05.00am-12.00pm and was thereafter on call until 08.00am the following morning. He had been called to attend a patient needing medical review at the SACU that afternoon. Whilst attending this patient around 4.00pm or just after, a senior Shift Nurse in charge of the unit made him aware that none of the patients had been able to vote as the mobile voting team had not been around. Dr Kathiresu understood that the Nurse had been assured on several occasions that the voting team would attend following completion of the main hospital wards and as this had not occurred patients were now anxious about getting to vote. She asked Dr Kathiresu if he there was anything he could do or anyone he could call.

4. Dr Kathiresu informed me he was unsure what he could do and decided to ring the hospital switchboard. They advised him they had a number for voting issues and placed his call through. A lady answered but handed the call over to a man whose name he did not get. This gentleman advised that they were really busy and would not be able to get to the ward for patients to cast their vote. He also informed Dr Kathiresu that he should let patients know that if they write a letter then they wouldn't get fined for not voting. Dr Kathiresu said he would be able to confirm the Nurses identity if required.

5. Dr Kathiresu informed some patients of the outcome of his phone call.

6. I spoke in person to the Townsville Hospital switchboard operators working on Sunday 24th July at about 10.00am. I enquired if they had an Australian Electoral Commission number to ring for election issues. The Townsville Hospital switch operator informed me that the only number they have is the mobile phone provided by the volunteer that does the mobile election booth in the hospital. She understood this to be the same person that always does the elections within the hospital. I am able to provide this name as needed. The switch operator also informed me that as per her discussions with the electoral volunteer there was only one electoral team for this election which is less than normal and why they struggled.

7. Following these discussions Dr Kathiresu sort my advice and I recommended him to make a formal statement regarding the events he described to me.

Dr Craig Costello

24th October 2016