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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release



GPs fear consequences of indigenous health records hand over

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) remains concerned about the implications of the Australian Crime Commission's (ACC) requirement that medical records of indigenous patients be handed over as part of its investigation into violence and child abuse in indigenous communities and the orders which prevented patients being told that their medical history had been handed to investigators.

The RACGP's response follows a recent Federal Court ruling that the ACC acted legally in its attempts to force a remote Aboriginal health clinic in the Northern Territory to hand over patients' confidential medical records.

"The RACGP acknowledges that protecting children from violence and sexual abuse is critical," said Prof Nigel Stocks, Chair RACGP SA/NT Faculty and GP in Adelaide.

"However, the requirement to surrender medical records to any authority without the knowledge or consent of a patient raises serious concerns about confidentiality and could lead to loss of trust in medical services. This could have a serious long term negative impact on the health of young indigenous people in the Northern Territory."

"GPs are the first point of contact in the healthcare system for many young people looking for contraceptive advice, treatment for sexually transmitted infections and care during pregnancy."

"The fear that records will be passed to the ACC may discourage young indigenous people from seeking that care and advice and could lead to an increase in pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections," Prof. Stocks said.

The RACGP urges all GPs to be aware of their legal obligations under the mandatory reporting requirements of their state or territory when they suspect child abuse may be occurring. Visit *Abuse and Violence: working with our patients in general practice* at www.racgp.org.au/guidelines/abuseandviolence. Also see the RACGP's detailed position statement on the Northern Territory's *Care and Protection of Children Act*, at www.racgp.org.au/policy/mandatory_reporting_and_Northern_Territory.pdf.

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About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) sets and maintains the standards for quality clinical practice, education and training, and research in Australian general practice, and represents Australia's urban and rural general practitioners. Visit www.racgp.org.au.