

TRANSCRIPT

TUE 27 MAY 2025

Transcript: AMA Queensland President Dr Nick Yim, 4BC Radio, Mornings with Bill McDonald, Monday 27 May 2025

Subject: Healthscope's collapse into receivership

BILL MCDONALD: Healthscope has thrown a huge spotlight on the future of private healthcare in this country. Healthscope, it's one of Australia's largest private hospital operators. It's responsible for 37 hospitals, around 19,000 staff and performs nearly three quarters of all elective surgeries in the country. The government and receivers have promised it's business as usual with no hospital closures or job losses. But the debt, it is staggering, with more than \$1.4 billion owed to creditors. To help us understand what this means, particularly for Queensland patients, staff and the broader health system, we're joined by AMA Queensland President Dr Nick Yim. Good morning.

DR NICK YIM: Good morning.

BILL MCDONALD: Thank you for joining us again. Earlier this year, Healthscope ended its contracts with Bupa and the Australian Health Services Alliance. What impact could that have on out-of-pocket costs for patients in Queensland and should they have been double-checking their coverage with their health insurers?

DR NICK YIM: Just to reiterate your introduction, this news about health care is quite concerning for Queenslanders. But to reassure Queenslanders, AMA Queensland has been advised that all its hospitals will remain open and operational with no current impacts to staff, doctors or patient care. But you bring up the greater issue of the private insurance and rebates to patients in hospitals. It's one of those challenging situations that we are seeing across the country – the viability of the private health sector. It is quite challenging in this current landscape.

BILL MCDONALD: As you mentioned, Healthscope operates several key hospitals here in Queensland. I should have mentioned that as well, including Brisbane Private, Gold Coast Private, Peninsula, Pine Rivers, and Sunnybank. So, all these facilities will continue to operate as normal during the receivership process and guaranteed moving forward, or is there some uncertainty beyond?

DR NICK YIM: Moving forward, there will be uncertainty. AMA Queensland will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure there is a smooth transition for staff, doctors and the patients involved. But to reassure right at this current time, there is no impact currently.

BILL MCDONALD: But to hear that there's assurances of no closures and redundancies, business as usual, especially for patients, is that realistic to say that?

DR NICK YIM: We know that in Queensland and across Australia, we need both a viable public and private sector. Without those two sectors being operational and viable, it's just going to continue to add challenges on already pressured public healthcare system. We have seen our public hospitals are

under the pump. This is the reason why we need both the state and federal governments to help work out a sustainable strategy moving forward.

BILL MCDONALD: The Health Minister, Mark Butler, he's ruled out a taxpayer bailout and given Healthscope's role in delivering private health care, especially elective surgery. Should the government be doing a bit more here, do you think?

DR NICK YIM: I think there's multiple elements, including the federal government, insurers and also private hospitals, they overall need to come together and work out a strategy moving forward. AMA Queensland, we have suggested a proposal for an independent private health system authority, and that gives us greater oversight over the sector because one of the challenges that we are seeing is the continued closures of private hospitals, which is not good for our society and community.

BILL MCDONALD: Do you see any other further role for industry regulators and bodies like the AMA in stabilising and overseeing seeing this transition to new ownership?

DR NICK YIM: AMA, we're always at the table. We're always engaging with all stakeholders that are involved. This is the reason why we're suggesting that we do some independent oversight to assist to maintain trust and transparency in the industry.

BILL MCDONALD: What's your message to patients and staff who may still feel a bit uncertain despite the assurances, especially in regional areas where health scope hospitals are often the only private option?

DR NICK YIM: This is a really good point. At the current stage, the reassurances are there. We've heard from the stakeholders that it's all business as usual at this point of time. At the same time, you hit a really good point, especially in regional and rural areas. We do need the private sector to be viable because it gives patients choice in those regional rural towns. At the same time, many doctors, nurses and healthcare workers actually often work between those two sides to ensure their viability.

BILL MCDONALD: Just to reinforce again, if anyone's listening about the impact for out-of-pocket costs for patients at this particular time here in Queensland, are there any other warnings or cautionary tales there for any patients?

DR NICK YIM: With regards to out-of-pocket expenses, private health insurance and private hospitals, the key thing here is for the community and patients to do their research. Have a conversation with their private specialist if they are planning to have surgery, have a conversation with the private hospital to see what out-of-pocket expense they might incur, and at the same time, have that conversation with their general practitioner, especially if they are asking which specialist to be referred to.

BILL MCDONALD: Will we see anything similar or anything more like this happen, if such a giant like this is going under?

DR NICK YIM: It is very concerning. I am concerned and this is the reason why we continue to call on the federal and state government to work with stakeholders moving forward because we do need trust in the healthcare system, especially in the private sectors itself. We need to ensure that it is viable and sustainable moving forward.

BILL MCDONALD: All right. Appreciate your time as always. Thanks very much.

DR NICK YIM: Thanks, Bill. Appreciate it.