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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Sky News Live, *AM Agenda with Laura Jayes and Peter Stefanovic*, Friday, 31 January 2020

**Subject:** Coronavirus

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**LAURA JAYES:** Well, let's go live now to the AMA [audio skip] after the coronavirus has just been declared an international emergency by the World Health Organisation. Joining us is the President of the AMA, Dr Tony Bartone. Thanks so much for your time. You've been a busy man, no doubt. You would have seen that announcement - perhaps not too unsurprising given how the coronavirus has spread this week. But can you explain what it actually means, this declaration, in practical terms?

**TONY BARTONE:** Well, actually, in practical terms for Australia, it's going to mean very little, because we have already instituted significant measures to ensure and protect the safety of the Australian public.

At an international level, it gives the WHO significantly more powers and ability to coordinate and release funds to further research and development of vaccines, for example, and to seek information from various countries and advise on travel restrictions in parts of certain countries. It's a measure that's been mooted for a few days now. They've been looking at the evidence and looking at the information, and so that will go into the - part of its thinking is to try and help protect the more vulnerable nations where health systems are not as mature or as developed as first world nations and to try and limit the spread of this virus internationally.

But back home at an Australian level, we've got some of the most advanced measures in place already. And so, from a practical point of view from the public's perception, we'll probably see very little change in advisory warnings and in the [indistinct]. But this is a constant, evolving situation so we need to be vigilant and stay attuned to any further updates.

**PETER STEFANOVIC:** Doctor, the World Health Organisation was at pains to say that it wasn't critical of the work that China has done to try and limit the spread [audio skip] it does have great concerns, obviously, if this does in fact spread to poorer nations, third world countries. What is a worst-case scenario here, if it does spread to those countries that don't have the strong health facilities, the good health facilities that are in countries like Australia?

**TONY BARTONE:** Well, we can see what's happening in China at the moment, and that is where a situation where they were caught potentially early on in an outbreak during a very significant flu season at the same time, because it is also flu season in China. And we've seen the massive number of cases there and it's not showing any signs of abating just yet.

But if we look at countries like Australia, we've been able to at this early stage - and I say at this early stage - to be able to implement significant resources to limit, to identify, to contact trace, and limit the spread of the virus in the community by instituting the measures that we have. If we didn't have those resources, if we weren't able to do what we've done, no doubt significantly more numbers of Australians would have been infected. So, replicate that in much more populous, much more densely connected, smaller countries with less effective health systems. and you could only imagine what might happen.

**LAURA JAYES:** You were critical of the Government using Christmas Island as a quarantine station. Were you a bit hasty in making those comments? Do you now know that the Government is actually going to put health professionals on the island that you would be more comfortable with?

**TONY BARTONE:** So, to be very clear about what we said yesterday, it was not that we were critical of the decision to isolate the returning evacuees. What we were saying is that there were more appropriate facilities to deal with the returning evacuees.

**LAURA JAYES:** [Talks over] Like what?

**TONY BARTONE:** Well, for example, the Woodside barracks in Adelaide has been identified as a possible location. I don't have the full list of the Government's assets and installations that could be used, but there would be many places where we could isolate to keep an eye on returning evacuees.

We don't need a 600-bed hospital. We just need somewhere where we can house, monitor, and isolate, with the same self-isolation practicalities that we're expecting everyone else to take part in if they have returned from Hubei in past 14 days. And so that's what we were saying. We're just saying, given the past history of Christmas Island, given its lack of proximity to emergency facilities, given the need to put in AUSMAT teams to back up the supply of medical professionals and medical technology on the island, we could have looked at much more appropriate and much more closer solutions to mainland Australia to, you know, to assist in the repatriation and then the reintegration back into the community of these evacuees.

**PETER STEFANOVIC:** All right. Tony Bartone, appreciate your time this morning. Thanks for joining us.

**TONY BARTONE:** My pleasure. Thank you.

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