

Medicos fume at 'secrecy' directive

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BOSSES at the Women's and Children's Hospital have been accused of "gagging, threatening and intimidating" staff from exposing internal problems engulfing the facility.

In a memo to medicos, hospital management warned about adhering to a public service code of conduct that bans media speaking or publicly criticising their workplace.

The bulletin stated secrecy would "maintain the reputation" of the North Adelaide hospital, its staff and clinicians.

But critics condemned the bulletin as threatening and a crude attempt at silence.

"This ... is a deliberate attempt to intimidate frontline doctors about the need to improve resourcing and health services," SA Salaried Medical Association senior industrial officer Bernadette Mulholland said.

"Gagging and threatening our doctors on these issues is a desperate attempt to hide the truth from the community.

"These doctors are dedicated to our women and children and should not be gagged ... and should be heard."

The gag row emerged after *The Advertiser* revealed details of a letter signed by 215 hospital doctors warning services such as childhood cancer and neonatal were "on the verge of collapse".

WCH chief executive officer Lindsey Gough urged workers to "contribute good news stories" to communi-

cation staff and warned permission must be granted to speaking publicly for the hospital or SA Health.

She said public servants must not breach a code of ethics despite workers wearing "different hats".

"It is important that all public sector employees adhere to this code to maintain the integrity of and public confidence in the public service," she wrote.

Unions are escalating public campaigns and have urged WCH medicos to share concerns.

Other action includes new ads and public appeals but doctors have ruled out strikes.

Hospital officials have also launched a second voluntary redundancy round.

Ms Gough defended the bulletin.

"We regularly remind staff of policies, responsibilities and processes through a variety of our communications methods," she said.

"We are always supportive of our staff and their rights to raise their concerns, and are always willing to have open discussions around any issues."

Labor's health spokesman Chris Picton criticised the "disgraceful" attempt at silence.

"They should be free to speak up about their serious concerns," he said. "This looks like the actions of some tin-pot dictator rather than a free country."

But Health Minister Stephen Wade said he was furious at the bulletin.

"I support clinicians' rights to speak out," he said.