



# 300 deaths in waiting

## Hospital delay of 8 hours

By ANTHONY DECEGLIE

UP TO 300 patients could die unnecessarily in WA emergency departments this year because of chronic overcrowding, the Australian Medical Association of WA has warned.

AMA state emergency medicine spokesman Dave Mountain said 55 per cent of emergency patients at some major hospitals were waiting longer than eight hours for a bed, a problem known as "access block".

"It is estimated that there were 150 extra deaths in 2003," Dr Mountain said. "That was when access block was running about 25-30 per cent."

"If you just did a linear calculation, that is 250-300 extra deaths a year occurring in WA (now)."

"Those sorts of systems are worse and more chaotic as you increase that level of overcrowding so it is possible that there are more deaths than that."

"Certainly, at a conservative estimate you would think that there are 250-300 extra deaths occurring a year because of the way we run our hospitals."

Health Department acting

director-general Peter Flett dismissed Dr Mountain's claims as "scaremongering".

Dr Flett said that despite emergency department presentations increasing by 6.3 per cent in the past year, the safety of patients remained paramount and there were a number of strategies to deal with demand.

"All public hospitals have procedures in place to ensure that patients who present at emergency departments are promptly triaged and monitored, and patients requiring urgent medical treatment are seen immediately," he said.

A Perth paramedic told *The Sunday Times* that on Monday morning she cared for an elderly, stretcher-bound patient who had to wait in urine-soaked sheets for more than two hours before being assessed at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital's emergency department.

A Health Department spokeswoman said the claim was being investigated.

The paramedic said she was often forced to toilet stretcher-bound patients while they were waiting on ambulance trolleys in hospital corridors.

There was no privacy and

patients were often exposed to strangers.

"When we're ramped, our patients are held up in a small area where there are serious health and safety issues," the paramedic said. "Patients are being forced to lie in their own urine for hours while they wait for a bed."

"It is humiliating and if I was a patient, I would be furious."

Dr Mountain confirmed that recently emergency patients had been left in urine-soaked sheets because there were no spare trolleys or cubicles.

"There have been recent incidents where some very similar things had happened at emergency departments in Perth," Dr Mountain said. "I have heard that from fellow consultants and that they have actually had to apologise to families for the fact that they just weren't able to change the patient."

"I don't think there is any doubt that it does happen and it is because we cannot change them when they are on an ambulance trolley. We haven't any spare trolleys or cubicles to get them into and you can't get them changed in the middle of an open waiting area."



**WA DECIDES**

# 40hr wait in corridor

## Health care 'in crisis

By ANTHONY DECEGLIE

A HORROR 40-hour wait for emergency surgery has made health the most important election issue for Dianella pensioners Cathy and Arthur Wardle.

Mrs Wardle, 73, arrived at Royal Perth Hospital's emergency department with gallstone pains at noon last Saturday. She did not have surgery until Monday afternoon.

Most of her time was spent waiting on a trolley in a hospital corridor.

"I was calm and collected until a nursing co-ordinator told me I was privileged to be lying in a corridor," Mrs Wardle said. "It's not good enough what is happening to people in our hospitals."

But that doesn't mean she will be voting for the Opposition at the September poll.

"We have got three stooges in the Labor party — Alan (Premier Alan Carpenter), Eric (Treasurer Eric Ripper) and Alannah (Planning and Infrastructure Minister Alannah MacTiernan)," Mrs Wardle said.

"But, on the other side we've got the Marx Brothers.

"So who can you vote for?"

Mr Wardle, 77, said crime in WA was out of control.

"It has gone mad," he said.

"Criminals aren't using ordinary methods any more. It's star pickets and big pieces of wood — anything they can get their hands on."

Mrs Wardle said she was too frightened to leave her door unlocked during the day.

She said tougher penalties were needed to deter criminal behaviour.

"Judges are just a joke," she said.

"Their sentences are too weak.

"I want a lot tougher sentences."

The Premier's pitch for the grey vote on Friday, by announcing free public transport for seniors from 10am-3pm on weekdays, did little to impress the Wardles.

"All of a sudden Carpenter has come out of the woodwork," Mr Wardle said.

"We hadn't heard from him until the election was announced.

"He's doing this now and then he'll go away again after we have voted."

The Wardles — who have four great-grandchildren — also called for stamp duty relief.