**Anaesthetists discuss management of mass disasters**

A meeting of anaesthetists in Western Australia tomorrow will discuss dealing with mass disasters, with a key presentation on lessons to be learnt from the 2005 London bombings.

Perth’s Princess Margaret Hospital for Children anaesthetist, Dr Mary Hegarty, was working for the London Air Ambulance at the time of the bombings and assisted in the relief effort.

She says anaesthetists are well-suited to assisting in disaster responses as they generally have a wide range of skills, including critical care, emergency skills and airway management across a diverse group of patients.

Dr Hegarty says some of the lessons from London include:

- The importance of simple measures, such as triage, first aid and airway management, which can be performed by doctors without access to equipment and can be a huge help to emergency crews when they arrive.
- The requirement for hospitals and staff to rely on forms of communication other than mobile phones, such as pagers and digital phones, that can still be used when the mobile network is down or clogged.
- The need for prior planning as hospitals closest to the incidents may become overwhelmed by casualties, and clinicians may have to manage patients outside their usual scope of practice.
- The necessity for doctors to take notes about their involvement, including information about patients, times, co-workers and contact details, to help their memory if called upon to give evidence at a future inquest.

Dr Hegarty will play audio recordings released by authorities of the first calls coming through to emergency services after the attacks, which showed confusion and misinformation about what had happened and where it happened.

The chaos meant a delay of about 30 minutes in emergency crews responding to the bombings.

“While no one can predict when disasters will occur, it is important for anaesthetists to receive training and preparation for the role they may play in the event of a disaster on a mass scale,” Dr Hegarty says.

**For more information about the conference, or to interview any of the speakers, please contact ANZCA media manager, Meaghan Shaw, on +61 3 8517 5303, +61 408 259 369 or email mshaw@anzca.edu.au.**