

## PETER, 42

### RNSH patient, Burns Unit

### Lobbying against the sale or long-term lease of the hospital, Willow Tree, Upper Hunter, NSW

**Peter, 42, a farmer from Willow Tree in the Upper Hunter region, NSW, has been a patient in the Royal North Shore Hospital (RNSH) burns unit for the last two weeks.**

**Following a shooting accident on his farm, Peter was transferred to RNSH after being stabilised at Tamworth Hospital to undertake intricate surgery. Within days, Peter had three operations and is currently undergoing rehabilitation. This is Peter's story.**

"I made a mistake with a loaded gun, firing it at point blank range accidentally and ending up with more than 100 bullet pellets in my knee and thigh.

"It's not until you've been in a situation such as mine that you realise how life saving it is to have access to major city hospitals," said Peter.

Peter was transferred to the RNSH after medical staff at Tamworth Hospital explained the detailed surgery Peter required was beyond that available in a regional hospital.

Peter has undergone intricate orthopaedic surgery to dig out as many pellets as possible from his knee and two plastic surgeries to remove pellets and repair the surrounding skin of his knee and thigh. Each operation has taken between two-to-three hours. While orthopaedic surgery and the first skin graft were planned in the one operation, the initial surgery took longer than anticipated and Peter's skin was too stressed to undergo an immediate skin graft, requiring him to heal and wait four days prior to a grafting attempt.

"I was on a waiting list for days, both because doctors needed time between each operation and being in one of the few state-wide hospital burn units meant those of us who were stable would have to wait for more serious cases requiring immediate surgery.

"I was not allowed to eat food or drink water before the operation and it was difficult being on standby. My wife came to Sydney for the first six days to be near me and she had to find local accommodation. My children also visited me during my first weekend stay in hospital, and they too had to stay overnight. It was an ordeal for all of us," Peter said.

Peter describes the importance of flowing hospital processes and an effective healthcare support system for patients in situations such as his as 'monumental'.

"Anything that inhibits the flow of processes involved in a patient's treatment places massive pressure on the patient.

"People making the decisions often don't have patient interests at heart," said Peter.

"I come from a remote country area. The less complication and the more support in place, the better for me and for other patients.



“Once the RNSH land is sold or leased, this will only further impact on process flow,” Peter said.

Despite his three surgeries, it has not been possible to remove all bullet fragments from Peter’s knee and thigh, as each removal requires the drilling of a hole into, and the removal of at least two millimetres of muscle tissue. Peter’s doctors say further surgery will only be undertaken if the fragments move and lead to new problems.

Currently Peter’s knee remains locked and stiff, and while he’s been placed into rehabilitation, it’s still early days in terms of his recovery.

“I’ve been having rehabilitation to try to bend my leg and I need to learn to walk again.

“Doctors are still unsure if I’m missing mobility functions. There could be some underlying nerve damage. There’s still swelling and I’m still healing,” Peter said.

“I may need to stay at the RNSH longer and I could have an injury that may not be repairable.

“It is an ocean of unknown for me and it’s not until people are in my position, reflecting on a situation such as mine, that it’s possible to understand this loss of control,” said Peter.

“No one who is fit and able bodied can understand the situation until they’ve experienced it. The only thing that gets you through is the human element.

“The RNSH staff are magnificent. They go above and beyond to make me feel comfortable,” Peter said.

“They deserve to be able to keep providing for their patients without any impediments.”

Having to be away from his family further impacts on Peter, who is expected to stay at RNSH until he can return to Tamworth Hospital for ongoing rehabilitation.

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**For more information, or to coordinate an interview with Peter, please contact Kirsten Bruce or Ruby Archis from VIVA! Communications on 0401 717 566 / 0413 834 906.**