

WCH faces crisis as 215 doctors sign a warning

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HEALTH REPORTER

FED up doctors say services at the Women's and Children's Hospital are at the "point of collapse" due to cutbacks and children face being sent interstate for critical health care.

The situation has reached such a point 215 doctors have signed a letter to management warning of the "adverse effect on the safety and quality of care" as a result of cost savings.

The letter, released to *The Advertiser*, comes as administrators call for a second round of applications for voluntary

Health workers tired, bullied



The Advertiser yesterday

separation packages, with the prospect of further staff cuts.

Doctors will meet tonight to discuss industrial options including ads, posters and an appeal for public support.

SA Salaried Medical Officers Association chief industrial officer Bernadette Mulholland said services "on the point of collapse" include childhood cancer.

"We are at the point where closure of services is a real possibility. This would force women and kids to go interstate for critical health care," she said.

"It is no exaggeration to call this a crisis – we have staff about to leave unless something is done. The only reason they are hanging on is to not let down the women and kids."

WCH chief executive Lindsey Gough has met with doctors over their concerns and said: "We have a comprehensive safety and quality program and since this letter was written, WCHN has been given full three-year accreditation under

the stringent new National Safety and Quality Healthcare Standards."

The WCH revelation comes as health union officials say fatigue and bullying issues are worsening to a point of illegal behaviour including junior clinicians being coerced into fudging time sheets to disguise their excessive hours.

Ms Mulholland said a doctor on Tuesday was refused a full eight-hour break between shifts and slept in his car before starting a clinic at a northern suburbs hospital.

The claims are among the fallout of a parliamentary in-

quiry into fatigue and bullying among health care workers. The inquiry made 27 recommendations after finding widespread problems.

Nurses union chief Elizabeth Dabars said a member survey showed staff burnout was on the rise, adding: "It is apparent that the culture is now one of fear and intimidation – there is a fear of retributions."

Opposition health spokesman Chris Picton said the damning report showed bullying was at its worst at the hospitals "where the Government is cutting frontline doctors and nurses."