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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, ABC Radio Sydney, *Breakfast with Wendy Harmer and Robbie Buck*, Wednesday, 4 March 2020

Subject: Coronavirus

ROBBIE BUCK: Let's get a response from Dr Tony Bartone. He's the Australian Medical Association Federal President. Morning, Tony.

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Rob.

WENDY HARMER: This must be concerning to you, that this has taken place in a hospital, and perhaps, some of your health working associates might be affected?

TONY BARTONE: This underlines clearly the important role that everyone has to play in helping to protect the community from the advancing pace of this COVID-19 virus. Our colleagues are at the frontline trying to do their best to keep both the people who are ill at the point of source, be it hospital or be it a frontline general practice, trying to keep them well and trying to also protect other patients there.

And it's the importance of having insurance that we're all doing our part by appropriate messaging of what to do - if you think you've got a suspected case, ringing ahead, notifying; the importance of the travel history; the importance of contact with anyone who you know has become unwell - all these things. And pre-signalling and sharing that information is part of the response to trying to help minimise the risk at the frontline. But also, of course, is the availability so that the healthcare workers can have the proper equipment, protective equipment, PPE as we call it, to ensure they can protect themselves and also protect the staff and other people around them at the time.

WENDY HARMER: Okay. So, I know that we've been seeing on social media, people have been to hospital emergency departments and people are presenting and just saying: well I was in a room with someone who was of Chinese appearance and was coughing. I mean, it's gotten as crazy as that.

Run us through exactly what we should do if we suspect that we have been in contact with someone who has the virus or we think that we have it ourselves, just one by one, if you would again, Tony.

TONY BARTONE: Okay. So, look, essentially, if you feel that you've been in contact with someone who may have the virus, obviously contact your doctor or the Government hotline and run yourself through the necessary steps that you need to take. Until you get advice, you should self-isolate to ensure that you minimise your movements and keep well clear of the community. If you feel that you've been potentially exposed or maybe coming down with it, of course, you would self-isolate and get that information.

Now, if you have symptoms, it's important that in the early phases, those symptoms can be just like the common cold but very quickly, you get that fever, sore throat, respiratory shortness of breath type symptoms, as well as a cough. Now, those symptoms, especially if you've been

travelling through any of those places - I mean, we see the maps in the papers on a daily basis, 67 countries now have confirmed cases. So if you've been travelling and you've got those symptoms, it'd be wise to contact your doctor, get the information, and see if you do fall into a suspect group, in which case you'll be asked to self-isolate until you can be tested and confirmed.

ROBBIE BUCK: Okay. And Tony, Tony, finally, do you feel that the health system is going to be able to cope with what increasingly looks like a pandemic here in Australia?

TONY BARTONE: Clearly, this is the issue at the forefront of all the people, of all the stakeholders, all the government officials and our planners alike. It is based on various modelling equations and depends on how quickly it spreads, and that's why the initial phase of containment is so important. By containment, we can slow the spread. Yes, as humans, we have no natural defence against COVID-19, but if we can slow the spread, we're able to have a slower sustained response in terms of managing it.

If we all don't take the precautions necessary and allow the rapid escalation, there's no way our services will cope with that demand. Our services are stretched at the moment, but there's planning in place to allow surge capacity by utilising private hospital resources, by setting up fever clinics, by utilising some of the excellent frontline GP staff and clinics to ensure that we have an ability to deal with the necessary unwell people, and that other people with mild symptoms should be able to be managed at home through telehealth resourcing and keeping them in self-isolation, so to speak, and away from the community, where we can minimise and limit its spread in the community.

ROBBIE BUCK: Alright.

WENDY HARMER: Alright. We have that. And to give everyone the number for that coronavirus hotline in Australia - it's open 24 hours a day, seven days a week - 1800-022-222. So that's 1800-022-222.

Thank you very much indeed, Tony.

TONY BARTONE: Thank you, Wendy.

WENDY HARMER: Dr Tony Bartone there. He is the Australian Medical Association Federal President.

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