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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, ABC News, *Breakfast with Michael Rowland and Virginia Trioli*, Thursday, 18 October 2018

Subject: Crisis in health care for asylum seekers on Nauru

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Now, the most senior Australian doctor caring for refugees on Nauru has been detained and deported from the island. Dr Nicole Montana replaced Dr Christopher Jones last month after he was also deported.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: Now, for more on this and the broader challenges being faced by healthcare professionals on Nauru, we're joined by the President of the Australian Medical Association, the AMA, Tony Bartone. Tony, good morning. Thanks for joining us.

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Virginia.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: Why was your Dr Montana deported?

TONY BARTONE: Look, we don't have actual clarity or any other specific information on that. What it does point to, however, is an ongoing crisis on the island. We've spoken about this humanitarian crisis evolving. This is just but another chapter of confusion and chaos on the ongoing story that is the provision of medical services to a very vulnerable group of asylum seeker refugees that are in a vulnerable state and need urgent medical attention; and we've been calling for particular children with specific issues to be taken off the island as a matter of urgency.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: What do you think of the Government that it hasn't yet - although we are hearing and reading, in particular, today that some refugee families are quietly being transferred from Nauru to Australia with no fanfare but that's going on. But what does it tell you that so far there's been no formal and complete acceptance of what the AMA has been calling for?

TONY BARTONE: Look, this just points to an ongoing uncertainty and confusion and lack of transparency in the whole issue. We were aware of isolated cases - two by two, one by one - of people being taken from the island and transferred on medical grounds, but usually after a very convoluted, long, drawn-out process, a lot of interventions required in very late stages of their medical conditions. Very, very urgent and unacceptable delays in that medical treatment being offered, with the delay then in transportation and being ferried with- as you say without fanfare.

What we need to remember, though, is that there are many tens of children, in particular, who are doing it extremely tough at the moment in very, very significant and severe states of medical conditions that require urgent attention; and we require a solution to address all of those children in dire needs rather than a piecemeal approach, which has lack of transparency and lack of medical oversight.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: Just before I let you go - I know that time is tight - but Tony Bartone, one of the reports suggested Dr Montana was detained because she took a photograph of a

child that she was treating, and the Government was worried that she was planning to leak it. If she was planning to use this photograph, for evidence purposes of what was going on, on Nauru, would you have a problem with that?

TONY BARTONE: Look, it's very important to know that doctors take photos of their patients with the patient's consent on many varied forms of ongoing clinical care. Clinical photography is an important part of the medical care. The speculation around why she did, or she didn't take the photo is irrelevant in this case. We need independent medical sovereignty over the medical services on the island to a group of people that the Australian Government has the care entrusted to them.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: So, again, just very quickly, can the AMA then, as an organisation, are you happy and prepared to keep having your doctors there on Nauru attempting to provide that service or does this bring it to a different position for you?

TONY BARTONE: We're extremely firm in our focus. We need to have an independent panel visit the island, assure, and give the transparency to the Australian public that the care and attention required is being provided; that those who need to be transferred are transferred immediately; to have a solution which takes vulnerable children off the island and to the medical care that they deserve.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: Tony Bartone, thank you so much.

TONY BARTONE: Thank you.

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