

Primary in demolition dispute over GP practice

Andrew Bracey and David Brill

A GP has taken a Supreme Court injunction against a subsidiary of Primary Health Care to prevent it from demolishing a medical centre in Newcastle, NSW.

The injunction follows the sudden closure of the Lambton Family Medical Centre on Friday 19 March.

Primary managing director of medical centres Henry Bateman said the practice was closed after negotiations with the building's owner, and contracted GP, Dr John

Fluit failed to secure an extension to an existing lease.

Dr Fluit was unavailable for comment, however the injunction was sought after workmen began work on the premises.

"It is alleged that workmen demolished walls, sinks and fittings and Dr Fluit is concerned that this damage will delay the building again being used as a medical centre for the benefit of the Lambton community," Dr Fluit's solicitor, Mr Robert Ishak told MO.

The NSW Supreme Court injunction prevents the subsidiary

company from demolishing, damaging or removing fixtures forming part of the premises.

Mr Bateman however rejected the claims and said the work was intended to return the building to its original state before the end of the lease period.

"There is some inference that we're maliciously doing it but it's just a process when a lease comes to an end," Mr Bateman said. "We've got three weeks to go – we've got to vacate the building, make good the building. To ensure continuity of care the practice has got to be moved somewhere so the patients can be seen."

However, CEO of local division GP Access Dr Mark Foster said he believed the closure had been the result of ongoing unrest among GPs in the clinic over Primary's style of practice. Dr Foster said the Lambton practice had previously had 11,000 patients on its books and while Primary had made efforts to redirect them to its Charlestown centre, many would struggle to commute.

The division was attempting to ensure Lambton residents could be seen by local practices, he said.



Work had begun on the interior of the practice before the injunction was sought.