

Drewitt derenas right to fight



CONCERN FOR CUSTOMERS: Northgate pharmacist Julianne Drewitt insists patients need adequate parking.

PHARMACIST Julianne Drewitt knows she has lost the public opinion battle in her war against the developers of a new \$2 million medical centre at Glenorchy. But she still believes her cause has been worth fighting for. Ms Drewitt, 49, has been fighting against the development of a new Independent Practitioners Network Clinic for more than a year. The medical centre is to be built on the old Northern Suburbs Clinic site, on Main Rd, Glenorchy, and will in-

One pharmacist hasn't taken the bitter pill of a council planning decision lying down, writes Mark Worley

clude 12 GP consulting rooms, a seven-day-a-week GP clinic, pathology services and a diabetes clinic. The Northgate Medical Centre will close its doors and merge with the Northern Suburbs Clinic at the site. The IPN clinic will be housed next door to the Glenorchy Priceline pharmacy — the major business rival for Ms Drewitt's Northgate Amcal pharmacy.

While Ms Drewitt maintains her fight is about the lack of car parking offered by the new medical centre, some members of the public believe there are other motives at play. Since her legal battle was made public in January, Ms Drewitt has been subject to countless letters to the editor where she has been called selfish, a whiner, shameful and greedy. "I am not reading the

comments any more, I have learned not to," Ms Drewitt said. "I can understand people would see me as being unreasonable because of the line being pushed by the developers and their spin team. "But people that know me know I am not doing it for money-related purposes and, in fact, I am certain there won't be any negative financial impact on my business at all."

Picture: NIKKI DAVIS-JONES

Ms Drewitt bought the Northgate pharmacy in 1999 and added the New Town Plaza Amcal chemist in 2006, building her team of employees to 29.

In recent years, she has become well known across Hobart through her appearances in TV advertisements for her pharmacies. She says she has worked hard to build a loyal customer base and doesn't expect to lose any of them through her opposition to the new medical centre. "I got into pharmacy because I wanted to help people," she said. "My customers have come

in and told me they will continue to shop at my pharmacy and I thank them for their loyalty."

Ms Drewitt says the Glenorchy City Council should never have granted development approval for the new centre because it will not have the number of car parking spaces required under the council's planning laws.

She says Glenorchy is becoming overcrowded with retail outlets, but the council has failed to implement a parking strategy to cope with the influx of customers.

"I am angry with the council for not upholding its planning scheme," she said.

"This is not a personal crusade, even if it is coming across as that.

"The onus should never be on a patient to have to go searching all over Glenorchy for a car park when they go to the doctor.

"It is just a ridiculous proposition, but the council seems quite happy to go along with it."

She is further angered by the lack of disabled parking spaces at the new medical centre.

"People who go to the doctor are often unable to walk far from their cars, yet that is what this new medical centre is going to make them do," Ms Drewitt said.

"These people are my customers and I want them to be properly catered for."

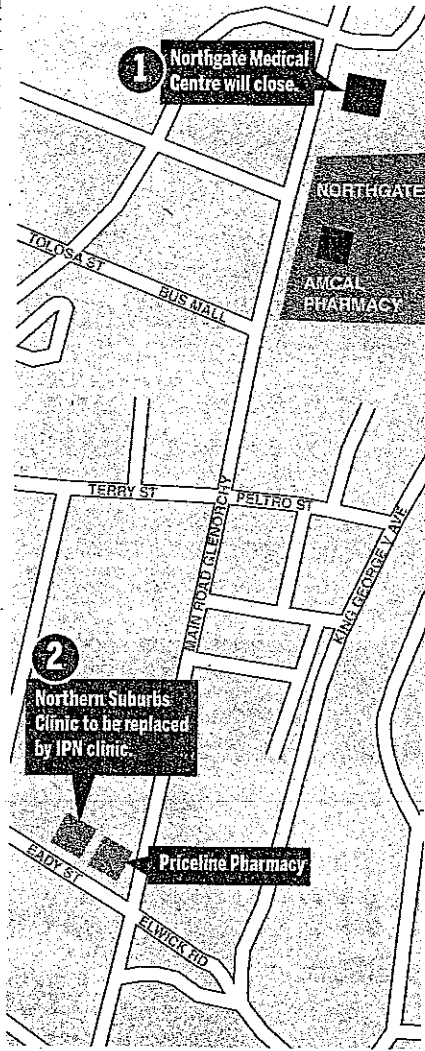
Ms Drewitt's opposition to the medical centre has taken her from Glenorchy City Council planning meetings to the Full Bench of the Supreme Court of Tasmania.

A final decision will be handed down by the Full Bench in coming weeks.

This is not the first time Ms Drewitt has fought a public battle for something she believed in, and she does not expect it to be the last.

In the early 1990s, she led a vocal group of female small-business owners opposed to the extension of shop trading hours.

"I'm very stubborn," Ms Drewitt said. "And it is in my nature to stand up for what I believe in."



CHANGES: What may happen if the IPN proposal goes ahead.

Clinic's year in waiting room...

THE development of the new Glenorchy Independent Practitioners Network (IPN) clinic has been stalled for more than a year because of the protracted legal battle waged by pharmacist Julianne Drewitt. The Glenorchy City Council approved plans for the new medical centre early last year, but Ms Drewitt took an appeal against it to the Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal. The appeal was turned down.

Ms Drewitt then took the case to the Supreme Court, where Justice Alan Blow also turned down the appeal. She then appealed to the Full Bench of the Supreme Court and a decision is expected to be handed down in the next few weeks.

IPN owns 86 medical centres across Australia, employing more than 1500 health-care professionals and providing general practice facilities for about four million people.

IPN managing director Malcolm Parmenter said the type of clinic proposed for Glenorchy made the GP lifestyle a much more attractive career path.

Speaking in February about the long-running legal battle, he said: "Patients and the general public have a right to demand to know why they are being denied access to services that are available to other Australians."

Developer Peter Hope said the community supported his proposal to merge the existing Northgate Medical Centre and the Northern Suburbs Clinic into a new centre. This year he gathered more than 1000 signatures on a petition supporting the new centre.

"Everyone knows there is a chronic shortage of GPs in the Northern Suburbs and this medical centre will mean an additional five doctors can begin working in the area," Mr Hope said.