

Submission to the PATS **Senate Committee Inquiry**

Introduction

The Karratha Cancer Support Group consists of members living in the Shire of Roebourne, approximately 1600 kilometres north of Perth. The area has no resident specialist medical practitioners to facilitate or coordinate services for patients following their diagnosis of cancer. Therefore, all our members have utilised the local PATS system to access diagnostic and treatment facilities in Perth.

Every member of the group has coped with significant issues with the system as it currently operates. Some points relating to the terms of reference met by our members are described below.

Consistency and uniformity of the scheme

- Applying some of the current guidelines can actually mean additional travel costs are incurred by the health service. For example, the requirement to book a return airfare from Karratha when the patient is already in Perth (e.g. on annual leave) and only a one way fare would be required.
- Individual cases relating to approval of a carer/partner travelling with the patient should be considered. For example, how would a mother undergoing chemotherapy care for an 18 month old child unless her partner is also approved to travel and stay with her ?
- Many patients become frustrated and anxious by PATS when they are queried as to their requirement to travel. The referral from a local medical practitioner to the appropriate specialist medical appointment or clinic can be refused by a non-medical practitioner, such as a Pats administrator or manager.

Improving flexibility for rural patient access to specialist health services

- Due to the current difficulty with the reliability of flight bookings in this area, patients need to fly to Perth the day before their appointment, given the real risks of flights being delayed or cancelled.
- Many specialist appointments are coordinated and sent from clinics in Perth, yet patients are required by Pats to visit a doctor in Karratha who is generally unfamiliar with the complexities of their case to obtain a signed PATS form. The majority of medical practitioners in this area will not bulk bill for this type of consultation, this only increases the financial burden for cancer patients which invariably affects their emotional state and recovery period.

Variations relating to improved travel and accommodation support

- Assistance with taxi fares to specialist appointments, clinics, to and from Perth Airport to the accommodation is desirable - the majority of patients accessing services for cancer-related issues are anxious, unwell, carrying luggage, attending appointments/treatments in unfamiliar locations.
- There are lengthy waiting lists at accommodation venues in Perth such as Crawford Lodge, so further consideration is required to provide additional accommodation or subsidise costs in commercial premises.
- The additional stress and fatigue associated with the above issues is detrimental to patients.
- Face-to-face contact with a nominated person in the local health facility is desirable, as many patients confirm the need for specific personnel to take ownership of issues relating to their case.

I appreciate your time with this submission.

Sincerely Yours,

The Karratha Cancer Support Group.

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Date : 18/05/2007

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