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The Senate Community Affairs Committee

Email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sirs,

Re. Patient Assisted Travel Schemes

I am responding to an advertisement recently placed in our local paper, regarding The Senate Community Affairs Committee 'examining the operation and effectiveness of the Patient Assisted Travel Schemes across Australia'.

I enclose a copy of a letter dated 17.10.2006, regarding IPTAAS funding and outreach clinics, that I sent to the General Manager of Clinical Operations (Dr Joe McGirr), Greater Southern Area Health Services, together with a copy of his reply.

There is no question that the IPTAAS scheme is an important mechanism for assisting rural families attending much needed specialty clinics. Obviously my area is in the delivery of regional paediatric medical services and I do have several concerns.

Firstly, as mentioned in my letter to Dr McGirr, it is my view that the best way to deliver specialty services to rural patients, if possible, is to 'bring the Mountain to Mohamed' and bring the service to the patients. I believe this is more cost effective and is certainly very supportive to existing local services and in the development of new local services. We have established many outreach clinics locally and feedback from our patients has been extremely positive. Obviously, this will not replace the need for some patients to travel to metropolitan centres for care.

Secondly, from time to time, significant pressure is applied to referring doctors to 'upgrade' the method of travel and sometimes this is generated from patients who can be demanding, when medical conditions do not dictate the need for upgraded travel. Frequently however the upgraded travel is often suggested by allied health personnel at outreach clinics, such as oncology nurses, suggesting that all patients with oncologic conditions should be flown to Sydney, with pre-approval from IPTAAS. The issue raised here is inconsistency and I think it would be helpful if there were very clear guidelines as to who should be accepted for prior plane approval and who should not. This would take the pressure off the referring doctors to make decisions based on parental demand, rather than medical need.

In general, the IPTAAS system in New South Wales works excellently. However, clearer guidelines for flight 'upgrade' need to be established. There also needs to be some flexibility of funding, so that specialists can be funded to run regional clinics, rather than sending all patients off to metropolitan centres.

Yours faithfully

Dr John Preddy

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It is not intended for use as a medicolegal report.