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24/05/07

The Secretary,  
Senate Community Affairs Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra

Re: Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Operation and Effectiveness of Patient Assisted Travel Schemes (PATS).

As a medical oncologist with a significant involvement with patients from rural and remote regions I have had long experience with subsidised travel and accommodation schemes for people from these areas. This goes back as far as the Commonwealth Government IPTAS arrangements before 1987.

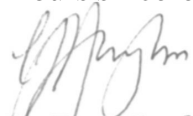
The current State-based scheme is operated by the various health regions responsible for the non-metropolitan portion of Western Australia. Each region has its own separate PATS budget. The strictness with which this is managed varies considerably. In one or two areas patients have reported difficulties obtaining assistance in getting to Perth, with pressures exerted to attend someone locally. As a visiting specialist myself, I fully realise the value in management being carried out as close to home as possible, but this is not something to be suddenly arranged at the last moment.

At the moment the means by which budgeting for PATS in each region is determined is not apparent. In particular it is not clear if the allocation is arbitrary or based on the potential costs of transporting patients.

In order to ensure that patients in rural and remote regions have the same access to specialised services afforded to Metropolitan inhabitants, there is a need to obtain accurate data on what the costs are for patient movements from different parts of the state. No doubt this would apply to other parts of Australia as well.

This would then permit the establishment of a uniform set of guidelines to assist the various health areas in ensure the scheme is run the same across all regions and ideally provide a rational base to determine the budgets for the different areas. Whatever system is established need to ensure that from the patient's point the procedures are kept as simple as possible, otherwise it might appear to the person that little has been achieved.

Yours sincerely



Dr Evan Bayliss