

## **Senate submission for Health Insurance Dental Services Bill 2012**

**Dr. Helen Arabatzis BDSc. (Melb)**

My name is Dr. Helen Arabatzis and I am a dentist who has received a demand notice for \$713,803.80. I am the practice owner of \_\_\_\_\_ and during the period of 2007-2009 I employed 7 dentists that willingly took part in the CDDS as we believed this was a way of helping the chronically ill in our community. All services have been provided and our patients are happy with the exceptional level of dental treatment they received. We bulk billed all of the patients, even though the fees as outlined by Medicare are significantly lower than our private fees. Again, this was our way of providing the community a service to those people in need, even if it meant a profit loss and in many instances free dental treatment. There have been a significant number of cases also that have financially exceeded the funds of the CDDS, often by thousands of dollars. We have never sought recovery of from these patients in relation to any excess. Again, this further emphasises that it was the provision of an exceptional level of community service that was our interests, not any profits that we obtained.

I deny I am indebted to Medicare. The demand notice that has been received is a result of failure to comply with the paperwork requirements of section 10 of the Health Insurance (dental services ) Determination. Nothing more.

I wish to state that the first time I knew of these paper work requirements was by a single phone call from a Medicare officer in 2010. A Medicare officer has never been to my practice nor has Medicare sent me any educational information. Our failure to comply with the requirements of section 10, are a direct result of lack of education. We had never been informed by Medicare of these requirements nor is it accessible on the web site. The call centres fail to give you that information also. The learning modules do not work and the educational information was only brought to our attention after the audit began. Once becoming aware of the requirements, we immediately took action to rectify our oversight. The practice was closed for a couple of days and all staff worked very hard in immediately retrospectively complying. I am told however that this is not good enough.

Subsequent to that phone call, I was asked to participate in a voluntary audit in which I supplied all the information that was asked of me. This lead to a full patient audit where again all information was provided by my practice with full cooperation. Whilst undertaking our own internal audit, we identified some administration issues and repaid voluntarily any discrepancies . This amounted to approximately \$25,000.00. Our full cooperation with the audit process, reinforces our honesty and integrity. Our meticulous administration amendments demonstrate the high level of professionalism

of this practice. In undertaking the internal audit, we identified that there was a large amount of invoices that were still outstanding from Medicare. This together with the re invoicing of the discrepancies has not subsequently been re issued to Medicare for payment. This amount remains outstanding.

We also indicated that there were various practitioners that had treated the patients even though the audit paper work was not correct in showing the provider. The demand notice for \$713,803.80 is for the entire practice not just myself, but Medicare has failed to identify which providers are responsible for which service. I have purposely not pursued this matter further with Medicare, and I have insisted on protecting my fellow employees and colleagues from any media and scrutiny which I have been the target of. I have provided my staff and dentists with emotional support but it has placed a huge strain on our working relationship. They have requested time and time again for us to cease accepting patients under the CDDS system and it is very unlikely that we would ever accept another government funded scheme.

My health and wellbeing has suffered hugely as a result of this audit process. I have received medical help as well as counselling since the audit process began. In 2011 I fell pregnant and suffered from severe high blood pressure as a result of all the stress I was under. The complications which occurred, lead to me almost losing my baby at 34 weeks, and potentially losing my own life as well. I was ordered to bed rest by my obstetrician. My child was born early and has a very serious heart condition which requires heart surgery. I believe the health of my baby has been compromised as a direct result of the audit process and stress placed upon me.

Finally, \_\_\_\_\_ has a staff of 20 hard working dentists, administrators, and dental assistants. I have worked particularly hard and with great integrity over the last 12 years to build this practice from a single operatory to a five operatory practice. I have always employed multicultural staff members to assist in servicing the community with translation services and other requirements that may not be regularly available to them from other dental providers.

Any pursuit by Medicare of financial recovery for the services rendered will result in the closure of \_\_\_\_\_ and loss of employment for all of our team. It will significantly and adversely affect our patients and community.

I have never misled Medicare. I strenuously defend any allegations made against me.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Helen Arabatzis

