

Dr Imran Ali

Tuesday, April 03, 2012

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To

**The Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee.**

Reference- Health Insurance (dental Services) Bill 2012 [No.2]

I am a dentist of 9 years standing having graduated from the University of Adelaide in 2003.

I started my career as a dentist from Ballarat Base Hospital and served the people of Ballarat for nearly three years . I then moved to Melbourne and joined Dr B.D.Sc (Melb)'s set up dental practice in the neighboring suburb of Thomastown in 2006 and over the years have built up the practice which currently has over 20,000 patients. My patients are multi-cultural but predominately elderly, illiterate migrants who are financially disadvantaged and mostly can only afford basic dental care.

When the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme (CDDS) was launched in 2008 , our clinic was swamped with majority of our existing patients wanting dental treatment they couldn't afford before. They were very thankful to this new government scheme which they were awaiting for a long time. I was more than happy to provide extensive ongoing dental treatment for these disadvantaged patients.

The scheme brought with it some administrative challenges which I had not previously faced in private practice. I had not previously had any dealings with Medicare or any other Federal health based organization.

At the beginning of this scheme we were given no clear direction in regards to the administrative side of this scheme neither was it stressed to us that providing a treatment plan to the patient as well as the GP was the vital part of this scheme and failure to do so will have consequences.

There was no proper training and understanding provided to us regarding the operation of this scheme as far as the administrative aspect is concerned. I want to know why these guidelines were not sent to all the dentists prior to launching the CDDS in 2008.

My priority was to provide quality dental care to my patients under the scheme which I did with the best of my ability and knowledge.

It was only recently that I became aware of Medicare's attitude towards the required paperwork and the need to ensure that it was completed BEFORE treatment. Up until then the priority was to provide the treatment, however in any event I have tried my best in providing dental plans to patients and referring doctors.

I have participated in a twenty patient self-assessment audit in October 2011. In every instance the patients received all the claimed dental care. When I received the self-assessment audit, I provided full copies of my own personal patient records, x-rays taken, lab work sheets, signed patient Medicare DB2-DP forms, GP Referral forms in good faith.

For my patients the paperwork was of no consequence, they were informed as to what treatment was required and were grateful that the government was funding the cost. Many of my patients were not interested in obtaining a written plan, they just wanted to get the treatment done and now when I tell them about the audit and how Medicare wants me to repay back all the money I have spent on their treatments which they so desperately needed, they very innocently ask me this question "but doctor you did the treatment for me and I am happy with your job, isn't that what this scheme should all be about".

I think Medicare has a lot of moral answering to do here as I find it absolutely unfair and immoral to torture the dentists who tried their best to make a difference in their patients lives and now they are being demanded to pay back money for all the services provided.

This Medicare audit is causing a tremendous impact on the mental health of the dental community. Our family life is getting greatly affected by this unwanted stress. We are unable to concentrate on our present job as we are so preoccupied about the uncertainty of our future as dentists and the impact it can have on us financially.

I as a dentist do not at all feel obliged in any way to pay back the money that I have already invested on improving my patient's oral health. I and my patients are equally happy and fully satisfied with the treatment provided.

The audit process has strained the relationship between the dental profession and Medicare and will be a great hurdle in the future if the government decides to roll out a universal dental scheme.

I support the audit targeting those dentists who have abused the scheme by claiming the item numbers for the work they never did but on the contrary it is targeting innocent and sincere dentists like me who's only "crime", if you like is that we failed to provide a "piece of paper" to their patients Before commencing treatment despite doing all the necessary dental treatments.

I strongly stress on the need to look into this matter in the light of morality and compassion and that Medicare must admit the fact that it failed to be transparent with the dentists and did not provide them with adequate information and training before rolling out this scheme.

I have seen this scheme do wonders to my patients. It has changed peoples lives around, brought that smile of confidence back and after a long wait majority of them are enjoying quality life now.

Thank You

Dr Imran Ali