

Subject: MEDICARE DENTAL SUBMISSION

To the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee

Thank you for the opportunity in allowing me to make a submission in relation to the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme.

The Medicare Dental Program has been beneficial to thousands of people obtaining quality treatment by the dental profession. As a Dental Prosthetist I have participated in this scheme to assist and provide quality dental treatment for patients suffering chronic disease.

It is apparent that many dental practitioners have come under scrutiny by Medicare.

I would like to make the point that I am not subject to an audit and more importantly do not condone fraudulent activity for financial gain. Pro-active audits that have found such findings are just and well deserved.

I do however feel strongly that I should write and express some concerns that my colleagues and I share with the scheme.

ADMINISTRATIVE NON COMPLIANCE

The lack of education offered by Medicare and or representative to our profession and association (ADPA) has resulted in many practitioners deemed to be non compliant and subject to audit and financial penalties.

The Medicare Dental schedule does stipulate that we need to provide a copy of treatment plan and costs to the patient and a summary letter of treatment to the referring GP. Not many if any Prosthetists received such a copy. Personally I did not and if I did not download and print the 60+ page Medicare schedule from the website when I registered I too would have been non compliant in this area. I received no information, documentation and reference material from Medicare what so ever.

Our experience with the Department of Veterans Affairs Dental scheme when treating patients differs greatly with the Medicare Dental Scheme.

A scheme of this magnitude deserved proper seminar type tutorials and education programs conducted by Medicare with the assistance of our association on the onset to educate us with the protocols but unfortunately this did not occur.

EDUCATION

In my practice I have found that there is a lack of education on behalf of the referring GP and the patient alike having to explain to sceptical patients how the scheme works in respect to patient/practitioner rights and entitlements.

I am not a bulk billing practitioner and set my own private fees in my clinic. I have been privy to verbal abuse by patients on occasions when they are informed there is a gap payment, that we do not all bulk bill or I cannot make them new dentures because they just had a set made

elsewhere.

Written literature for English and non English speaking patients should be forwarded by GP's to the patient outlining how the scheme operates, their rights, options, costing, payment methods and how dental practitioners are entitled to operate. Patients should be able to present for dental treatment well informed but this is not the case with little or no verbal/written information provided by their Doctors.

RESTRICTION OF TRADE

As Dental Prosthetists we have autonomy in providing full dentures and partial dentures direct to the public. These qualifications are endorsed by the government, recognised by all private health insurance schemes and the Australian Government Department of Veterans Affairs when treating patients. The Medicare dental scheme however does not allow GP's to refer patients directly to Dental Prosthetists for partial dentures, only Dentists.

This is clearly undermining our qualifications as professionals, severely restricting our rightful trade and above all compromising our integrity to our patients causing severe and unjust embarrassment.

Despite this, it is apparent that some GP's are not familiar with this ruling and are referring patients direct to Prosthetist's for partial dentures. Having being in this situation I have called Medicare numerous times to obtain clarification and guidance only to have been given conflicting information. That is: I cannot treat the patient and should refer them back to their GP, I can treat the patient, I should refer patient to dentist first before treating, not permitted to refer to a dentist, should not undermine the GP's care plan and referral??????????????????

This has become a frustrating encounter for both practitioners and patients, compromising the welfare and treatment the patient deserves. How is it that the same patient can go to a Prosthetist privately for treatment, as a Veterans Affairs patient but not direct via Medicare? Further to this it is quite embarrassing when it is an existing patient treated prior for partial dentures but not eligible to be treated via Medicare direct? To be deemed non compliant and have penalties issued in relation to this area is unjust.

The Medicare Dental scheme is for the benefit of the Australian public but I feel it also has a duty of care to provide practitioners with the appropriate education. Logic should prevail when determining a practitioner non compliant and fines issued. We should be improving the scheme in deficient areas and establish clear rulings to assist dental practitioners remain compliant and provide treatment confidently.

Sincerely

Jim Peters
Dental Prosthetist