Marina Donnellan

7/04/2012
Senate Finance & Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission to the Senate regarding the Chronic Diseases Dental Scheme

Dear Sir / Madam,

Please accept this submission for review that relates my view on the situation dental practices and their families are facing in regard to the Chronic Diseases Dental Scheme. My submission is in two parts. Firstly as the Practice Manger of our Dental Practice and secondly as a wife and mother with a family to take care of and provide for.

The Practice Manager

Our practice is a small family owned and run dental practice that employs five people including my husband, the Dentist, and myself as the Practice manager. One of the employees is part time. My husband and I have worked extremely hard to build our Practice over the years facing many difficulties and challenges. We are good and honest people and provide the best service and care possible for our patients with excellent support from our employees. It is still a challenge to keep our practice profitable with holidays few a far between and sick days even fewer.

I fully appreciate the cost of Dental care to the public and viewed the CDDS as beneficial to individuals with over bearing medical costs due to their multiple health issues. We soon learned that providing care under this system created significant administration difficulties to the point that reception staff did not want the responsibility of processing the claims. We were in contact with Medicare on many occasions and their "advice" was often conflicting and difficult to interpret. Processing required us to individually create receipts as our current and up to date OASIS dental software could not produce receipts suitable. Early on Medicare allowed us to write item number adjustments by hand but they stopped allowing this late 2011.

I asked my husband, with consensus from the other staff, to review his position on seeing new CDDS patients. As further administrative problems with the scheme became apparent following an active advice campaign from the Australian Dental Association, we made the decision to not see new CDDS patients in late 2010 unless it was an existing patient. We are likely to stop seeing any CDDS in the near future.

It seems that this view is common amongst other Dental practices. We have received several telephone calls this year from prospective new CDDS patients and after advising them we do not participate now, we were told that other practices had given the same answer. One lady became quite irate and said we were the 10th practice she had tried.

I am told that Medicare is seeking to have money repaid for clerical errors and other paperwork issues. I cannot fathom the unfairness and injustice of this stance. If the dental work has been done in accordance with a standard expected by the Australian Dental Association and the Dental Board, how can this be true? If we are required to pay back money, it will send our practice into dire financial circumstances. Other practices that have seen many more CDDS patients than us will certainly be bankrupted.

It is an absolute outrage that a Government could stand by and allow this happen. Surely there must be outcry against such phenomenal injustice.

The Wife and Mother

My husband is an honourable and decent person. He is caring and honest with his patients and commits much of his free time to the charity work done through Rotary. The anxiety he is suffering over the current Medicare auditing is causing me tremendous concern as a wife. He did not do anything to deserve this situation and those people driving this unjust witch-hunt should be ashamed of themselves. It is a smear on the face of our Government.

I am worried about the implications all this will have on my family. If our business suffers the damage will be far reaching affecting my children, our employees, our business associates and their families.

For heaven's sake, I implore you to use some common sense and do what is fair and just.

Yours Faithfully,

Marina Donnellan