

03 April 2012

Senate Finance & Public Administration Committees  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

**For the Attention of The Senate Committee**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to your committee on behalf of myself for the Chronic Dental Disease scheme

As background, we as dentists were asked to participate in this scheme to provide assistance to chronically ill patients through the private system. Medicare provided only scant information about the scheme without any systematic training into how and when the scheme would run.

Medicare provided to my staff paperwork which was received in an envelope with very little working information. It only became apparent to us, the working's of the scheme, as patients started to present with these vouchers.

At no stage was it informed to us that as a requirement we provide the doctor with a statement prior to commencing the treatment was known to our practice. In fact it is contrary to most referral schemes in that if someone refers a patient to you, you carry out the treatment and then send a post op report.

We had not had exposure to any other schemes provided by Medicare prior to this scheme and as such did not know its workings or its implications. We have previously had exposure to the Department of Veteran's Affairs and my administrative staff deal with this on a daily basis as they have done and the scheme is far easier, clear and well explained.

Many times my staff had asked Medicare for clarification about the scheme and we were told on numerous occasions that what we were doing was the correct and compliant way. My administrative team are happy to sign a statutory declaration for you in this regard.

My current situation is that we have had an initial audit and have been found on a few cases to have not complied with the clerical phase and not complying with a letter to the referring GP prior to commencement of treatment.

At no stage have any of our cases not had the treatment completed and no items have been claimed at all for untreated services. My patients have greatly benefited from the services provided.

As a result of not being compliant on a clerical basis on a sample of cases my patients were not adversely affected in any way. Medicare auditors have been to my clinic and as a result of my experience to date of the Medicare scheme the level of recrimination for a clerical mistake which was not only an oversight but not fully explained in detail and clearly by Medicare, I feel it is nothing but a money 'witch hunt' to penalise dentists to try and balance the budget of health as there is no other reason for this as the patients that had their sound, good treatment was carried out in good faith.

Thank you for the opportunity to view and give you my assessment of the situation and I hope that the committee can make a rational and sensible decision of what is right and wrong and support the Bill's intent.

Yours truly

Dr Larry Benge