

## **Submission to Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

12<sup>th</sup> April 2012

### **Re: My experience with the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme.**

Dear Committee members,

I am a new graduate dentist, currently working in rural . I graduated from the Dental School at the University of Melbourne in 2009 and in my 2 years of practice so far, I have worked in both the private and public sectors in metropolitan and rural .

I first heard of the Chronic Diseases Dental Scheme when a patient presented to me with the CDDS form in my first month of clinical practice, as referred by the local GP. Not having known of the scheme at University, I followed the protocol of the practice and proceeded to follow what other dentists at the practice did. This included sending a copy of the treatment plan to the GP, and verbally discussing in detail the treatment plan with the patient before receiving consent, as we were taught to do at dental school. I was not aware that a written copy of this discussion was to be given to the patient. As Medicare continued to make payments to the practice for the treatment that we completed, I assumed that my protocol was correct and I was never prompted to change my method of practice. Also, I never received any calls from medical practitioners, seeking discussion or change to the treatment plans that I had sent.

I found that many of my patients in rural Victoria, who I treated under the CDDS scheme, had quite severe dental disease, a high need for preventive care and a lack of dental awareness. I was happy to participate in the CDDS scheme as I could anticipate that without the CDDS, much of the disease that I saw would have gone untreated. Many patients were very grateful for the holistic treatment that they received under the scheme, as many would otherwise only come to the dentist in absolute emergencies.

I first learned of the compliance requirements in section 10 of the Health Insurance (Dental Services) Determination 2007, when I received a letter from the CEO of Medicare Australia on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2011. This was the first such letter that I had received from Medicare since I commenced clinical practice. This was also at a time when a close colleague of mine was asked to participate in a Medicare Audit. I immediately changed my administrative protocol for CDDS patients, and ensured that I had complied with the requirements for my previous patients too.

In the coming months, I saw the immense stress and anxiety that the audit process was causing my colleague, who is also a new graduate like me. My colleague had to reconsider her mortgage as she was under the constant threat that Medicare would demand full repayment of all monies that she had claimed, of which she had personally only received a percentage. It was very distressing to witness, to the point where I was compelled to write to my local MP who kindly passed my letter on to the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Human Services. In the

response I received, it was suggested that ample information was available about compliance requirements for CDDS and that my colleague and I should have been aware of the scheme's requirements. The Minister stated that a letter was sent to all dental practitioners by the then Health Minister, the Hon. Tony Abbott, upon commencement of the scheme in 2007. I do not understand how I could have ever received that information, as in 2007, I was still a student at University and not yet even a dentist.

The most hurtful aspect of the audit process for my colleague and myself is that Medicare accuses you of being "non-compliant dentist", deemed a terrible practitioner, when all that one wants to do upon graduating from University is to do the right thing by the patient. I ask the committee members to consider, why would any new graduate intentionally not comply with the scheme, when we have worked so hard in VCE to get admission into the dental course, worked so hard for 5 years to be able to graduate and worked so hard to find employment? Why would any dentist, not just new graduates, want to intentionally jeopardise all of this effort? It is just not plausible that a dentist, who is fully aware of the scheme requirements and of the risk to their career and livelihood, would deliberately choose to not comply. Personally, I was honestly not aware of the scheme requirements until the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2011, 15 months after I commenced clinical practice.

I do believe that my patients have benefited from the treatment I have given under the CDDS. However, I will be hesitant before participating in any future Medicare Schemes because of fear of the stress, anxiety and pain that my colleague has, and continues to endure. I feel frustrated and cheated by Medicare, only 2 years into my career as a dentist.

I appreciate your time in reading this letter, and I happy to discuss these issues further.

Kind Regards,