

5 April 2012

Senate Committee  
Parliament House

My Name is Dr Hong Vo. I practise at two dental clinics in , both of which I am part owner. I have been audited under the Chronic Disease Dental scheme in July 2011. To date, although I have participated in this audit by happily providing all information required, I have not been advised of an outcome yet nor have some of my colleagues whom are also being audited.

Who would have known that participating in this dental scheme purely for the benefits of my patients would have led to an audit which to date has impacted me and my colleagues on so many levels.

Some years ago I recall a few patients asking whether I was a dentist who participated in this dental scheme. At this time I had no intention of participating on any level. However over the course of several months I found a copious number of patients requesting that I participate as they required dental care and many required it desperately. My patients had been introduced to the dental scheme by their respective GP's, which would allow them dental care that they otherwise would never be able to obtain due to lack of finances.

In my vast experience as a dental surgeon I have come to understand that a substantial number of people in the community who are in need of serious and non-serious dental care as a result of unfortunate ailments. Given that patient care has always and will always be paramount in my approach to my business, I felt it almost an obligation to make myself available for my patients to obtain care under the Chronic Dental Disease Scheme. Keep in mind many of the patients I have seen under the dental scheme are people that have been patients for many years, supporting my business from the time of opening, so it seemed fair that I support them in their time of need just as they have and still continue to support me.

To date, my patients have been most thankful for my agreeing to participate in the scheme as it has allowed them to obtain optimum dental health. It has also encouraged them to take a more proactive approach in being educated and responsible for ongoing dental health which in turn is beneficial in contributing to their general health however for many, it is absolutely imperative. I have not yet had a patient inform me who has not either benefited from the scheme, or has been unhappy with any service that I have provided, nor do I expect of such.

During my years of practise I have only ever participated in the scheme under the Veteran Affairs, VGDS scheme and EDS scheme. Given the simplicity of the schemes and the benefits it had on patients I did not foresee or imagine that the Chronic Dental Disease Scheme would differ too much.

And so upon making the decision to participate, my staff at the time contacted Medicare by telephone regarding the procedures required under this scheme.

We were advised over the phone of queries we had and many subsequent phone calls were made. It was apparent that information provided would differ with each phone call made. The ADA also provided information at a later stage. However no one from Medicare attended our clinic for education purposes nor was the offer for information to be sent or emailed made.

On many occasions I would meet with fellow dentists both on a personal and business level and talk of the scheme would arise. We appeared to all have similar opinions as to what was administratively required however we were going about fulfilling these requirements in many different capacities. From time to time I would hear differing opinions in terms of the requirements and would then make alterations with certain administrative details. Never would I have thought that details with administration would be considered a matter of compliance or non-compliance or that either my fellow colleagues or myself would ultimately be the subject of an audit.

The auditing process and the media attention it has attracted has in my opinion been nothing short of unjust. The connotations associated with the “dentists who are being audited” have been compared to activity of unlawfulness and criminality. In relation to my audit I hope to be informed a favourable outcome however, based on the stories of colleagues I have read, I am unsure as to what to expect. It is with this that the impact of an audit becomes relevant. Reading of outcomes of other colleagues audits leaves me to question the effect that a non-favourable outcome would have on my future. There is no doubt the impact would be significant enough to affect my ability to sustain a profitable business and in turn affect my ability to support my family and retain employees, and the effect on them is obvious. This weighs heavily on me on a daily basis. I am a dentist who has at the request of my patients, agreed to participate in a dental scheme for community benefit. I have supplied all services claimed, and I consider my reputation in the community to be held in high regard.

As to date, no one has informed me of any non-compliance issues, therefore I intend to continue helping my patients in any capacity that I am able to, because that was my intention when I chose dentistry as a career.

Dr Hong Vo  
Dentist