

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-11, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-359

OUTCOME 5: Primary Care

Topic: PRACTICE NURSES IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

According to media reports (Australian, 7 October 2010), there is considerable concern amongst general practice as to the viability and effectiveness of the new system.

- a) Is there any proof that these cost-cutting measures will not exacerbate pressure on general practice?
- b) Is there evidence that the national doctor shortage and workload of GPs will be addressed under this new model?
- c) Will some general practices be worse off under the new system?
- d) What modelling has the Department done to explore the impact of the Government's changes on the uptake of practice nurses by general practice?

Answer:

- a) This new funding arrangement will redirect current funding for practice nurses from the Practice Incentive Program practice nurse incentive and the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) practice nurse items as well as investing an additional \$390.3 million over four years. This is not a cost-cutting measure. Evidence indicates that practice nurses undertake a range of activities which extend well beyond the limited services itemised in the current MBS practice nurse items.
- b) As part of a multidisciplinary team, working alongside GPs, practice nurses are not intended to address workforce issues such as doctor shortages. However, there is evidence that practice nurses can assist GPs with workloads, enabling GPs to focus on patients with more complex clinical care needs. The new funding model supports a broader range of assistance for GPs consistent with the scope of practice of a practice nurse.
- c) A small number of practices may be financially disadvantaged under the new program. However, the vast majority of practices that currently employ a practice nurse are expected to benefit financially from the new program. For those practices that may be disadvantaged under the new arrangements, grandfathering arrangements will be in place for the first three years of the program.
- d) The new arrangements are intended to support the role of practice nurses. It is expected that these arrangements will encourage more nurses into general practice.