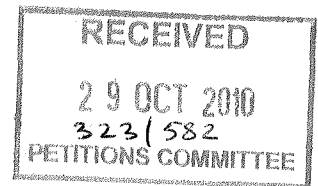




**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AGEING**



Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Chair

I refer to correspondence of 16 June 2010 from the then Chair of your Committee, Mrs Julia Irwin, regarding a petition about children with a tube feeding dependency. I apologise for the delay in responding.

The provision of intervention programs in Australia, such as the Graz model of weaning children from tube feeding, is currently a matter for state and territory governments to implement within their hospital systems, in consultation with the relevant Medical College. I have been advised that the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne is planning to undertake a review of international tube weaning programs in Austria, the United Kingdom and Canada in 2011.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare collects information on diagnoses and procedure information on episodes of care, including on neonatal tube feeding procedures. In Australia, there were 23,767 hospital separations in 2007-08 where a neonate or infant whose condition originated in the neonatal period was provided with a nasogastric tube for nutritional purposes. Data is only available for infants whose medical treatment occurred in hospital. No national data is available as to the level of infant tube feeding dependency.

The Australian Government, through the Medical Treatment Overseas (MTO) Program, may provide financial assistance for some people to receive treatment overseas where it is not available in Australia. However the Australian medical profession needs to accept it as a standard form of treatment for the applicant's condition.

Since January 2009 my Department has received and assessed four applications for assistance through the MTO Program for families to travel to Graz, Austria, to attend the tube weaning program at the University of Graz Children's Hospital. It is currently assessing two new applications.

The Government is committed to improving the flexibility and efficiency of the Australian health care system. That is why we reached an historic agreement at the Council of Australian Governments, with the exception of Western Australia, on health and hospitals reform – the establishment of a National Health and Hospitals Network.

This represents the most significant reform to Australia's health and hospitals system since the introduction of Medicare, and one of the largest reforms to service delivery in the history of the Federation. These reforms will deliver better health and hospitals by:

- providing more doctors, more nurses and more hospital beds;
- helping patients receive more seamless care across sectors of the health system;
- improving the quality of care patients receive through high-performance standards and improved engagement of local clinicians; and
- providing a secure funding base for health and hospitals into the future.

The Gillard Government is investing an additional \$7.4 billion to implement these reforms, including:

- measures to tackle the key pressure points in our public hospitals, including quicker access to emergency departments and elective surgery waiting times;
- over 1,300 new sub-acute care beds to support rehabilitation, palliative care and mental health services;
- 2,500 additional aged care beds to provide the right care at the right time;
- more training places for GPs and specialists and locum relief for rural nurses and allied health professionals;
- more support for nurses, particularly in aged care and general practice;
- an expansion of GP and primary health care infrastructure, and better access to after-hours primary care;
- transforming the way in which Australians with long-term illness are treated – starting with people living with diabetes – through voluntary coordinated care arrangements;
- new investments in mental health, including help for 20,000 extra young people to get access to mental health services;
- a nationally consistent aged care system providing extra places, better access to services, and stronger choice and protections for older Australians;
- a personally controlled electronic health record system; and
- new investments in prevention, including tough new action to tackle smoking.

These reforms and investments will drive major improvements in service delivery and the Gillard Government will continue to work closely with the states and territories and stakeholders to implement these reforms to ensure better health outcomes for Australians.

I trust that the above information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

NICOLA ROXON

28 OCT 2010