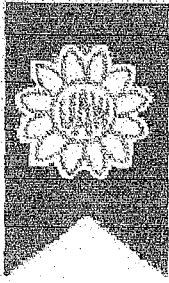


STANDING COMMITTEE  
20 JUL 2006  
ON HEALTH AND AGEING



## UNION OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN

### DOCTOR SHORTAGE

*I am here today to give evidence on behalf of the Union of Australian Women because as a women's organization we are concerned about women and their families and that of course includes their health.*

*We have for some time noticed the decline in our health system. Our membership consists mainly of older women and we have seen a change in attitude of many health professionals towards the elderly in recent years. One doctor was heard to say that elderly patients have complex problems, they are twenty times more of a burden. We remind that doctor and others, that it is those who are elderly now, who years ago, fought for the introduction of Medicare for the benefit of people today.*

*There is talk all the time about how people are living longer and we owe this to medical people. But, at the same time, there seems to be an attitude of some professionals that they would prefer to spend their time healing the young rather than wasting their time on older people and assisting them to have some quality of life in their later years.*

*As people get older there are times when they are too ill to attend the doctors surgery and need for the doctor to see them in their home. Unfortunately, many doctors these days are no longer prepared to do this. We understand the government has restrictions on home visits—only payment for one home visit is allowed—from then on, under bulk billing, after that first visit the doctor is only paid for a five minute visit. Five minutes is all that is paid for in the surgery.*

*WE realize, there is a shortage of doctors and their time is precious. Our UAW members have noted the shortage of doctors, and have found that the waiting time for an appointment is often from two to four weeks. When one is feeling ill having to wait to see a doctor for this length of time is unacceptable.*

*In Swansea for instance, where I live, two years ago we had the choice of three doctor's surgeries. Now the doctors at the only surgery left in*

*Swansea have all closed their books. Elderly patients, and there are many elderly people in Swansea who have retired to Swansea to live out their lives, are now forced to travel to Belmont to see a doctor. They can either wait for an appointment in the afternoon for at least two weeks, or wait to see the doctor in the morning without an appointment for hours on end. If one is feeling ill sitting in a doctor's surgery for many hours is not the way we should be treating our elderly, or anyone else for that matter.*

*The situation in Swansea will only become even more serious when a new development south of Swansea will bring an influx of hundreds more people with their nearest suburb, Swansea.*

*We ask ourselves why, over the years, has there been such a decline in the number of doctors. It is our understanding that the present Federal Government has for many years limited the number of students who can study medicine at university and there is a limit to the number of provider numbers given to doctors when they complete their course. And we have to ask, why? Also we have heard that there are a number of doctors, once they retire, who do not hand in their provider numbers to enable younger doctors to be given these numbers and set up practice. Is this so? If so, surely the government should be taking action to remedy the situation.*

*Recently we wrote to the minister for health, Tony Abbott, expressing our concern and his department replied telling us of the number of initiatives the government has taken to try to remedy the situation. This is fine, but, we cannot help but wonder if some of these initiatives had been taken some years ago would there be the need for these initiatives now.*

*Members of the UAW obviously do not have the answers to this very serious problem but when we look at the fees that specialists are able to charge with no restrictions in comparison to that of the GP's fees there does seem to be a great anomaly there. Should the government increase their Medicare payment to GPs? Should there be a restriction on the amount of payment specialists demand?*

*Something certainly must be done if we are not to be placed in the same situation as in America, where only the wealthy can afford to receive medical attention. This is Australia and Australians expect their government to do better than this.*