

To the Inquiry into the Health legislation Amendment Bill 2005

I am writing to ask that my comments be added to the input for this inquiry. The time frame given for the public to respond has been inadequate and so this is late in reaching you, but I feel I must still write.

My concern is that the decision making processes for deciding which drugs are approved for Medicare benefit funding and which are not is seriously flawed. Decisions appear to be made without reference to research, public opinion and without the health of the whole community in mind. It appears that certain drugs/medicines which are given Medicare benefits are given government support because of preferential treatment based on nebulous concepts and without community support, while others with good and clear reasons for support are not given support. The mechanism in which government makes the decisions is a flawed mechanism.

For example I believe it is wrong that the male sex enjoyment drugs such as the Viagra types, are supported with benefits while other life saving cancer, asthma and abortion drugs are not. I particularly want to express my concern that the drug mifepristone RU486 is neither available in Australia OR on the Medicare benefits approved list. There is clear evidence that it should be readily available and supported by the government.

Mifepristone RU486 has been licensed for use in France since 1988, in the United Kingdom since 1991 and in the United States since 2000 and has been proven to be a safe alternative to surgical abortions and Australian women deserved more options. Two million women worldwide have used RU486 and it's proven to be safe and I think Australian women ought to have that choice as well. The Australian Medical Association supports the move to make it available and the Senates resistance to the strong clear professional advice is abhorrent. There are many reason why it should be available including for women living in the country where there's no access to surgical procedures. The abortion pill can offer an alternative lower-cost and equally safe option.

Private religious views should be disregarded in assessing all request for funding and support especially in the case of the abortion pill but instead such opinions appear to be driving the government decision. The research of the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2003), should be recognised and decisions made using that information, which found that 81.2% of Australians agreed that women should have the right to choose an abortion. This means also the right to choose medicines for that purpose over surgery.

This inappropriate personal and private abuse of the power of government, the resistance to change and the attitudes relating to this particular medicine RU486 gives evidence of the concern about the independence, professionalism and correctness of the decisions of the government in setting Medicare health benefit support.

I also ask that the senate affirm and recognise its support for the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and, in particular, Article 12 that refers to the need to ensure "access to health care services, including those related to family planning". This convention supports that the RU486 should be available under the Medicare health benefits and supported by the government.