

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

20.07.2007

Dear Secretary,

I am a self-funded retiree who had planned to operate a small business exporting products from Australia. I had worked for a multi national company for thirty years and enjoyed a good income, always paying top Australian marginal tax rates. During this period I had continually travelled with Australia's International Airline and was pleased to "Call Australia Home". In the event that I travelled independent from my employer, it was my practice to purchase International Travel Insurance from the Airline and its partnering Insurance Company. I was of the belief that this was a secure policy.

In April 2006 I ventured into Asia with the intention of following up opportunities generated during previous excursions. In accordance with my usual practice I purchased Travel Insurance from the Airline, at their office at Melbourne International Airport.

This policy stated "Overseas Medical Expenses.....Cover includes hospital, para-medical and emergency dental costs incurred outside the Commonwealth of Australia. Section 1."

The following is a summary of my particular medical emergency:

Drugged, kidnapped, robbed and abandoned for 24 hours.
Discovered by accident and rushed to a public hospital.
Admitted to emergency ward and teeth smashed in a procedure necessary to save my life
Unconscious for three days
Woke up to find my arms and legs strapped down to the bed.
Unconscious for another six days.....Critically ill!

During this period the following occurred:

Australian Consul visited me on more than one occasion but because of my condition could not communicate.
Australian Consul rang my neighbours in a desperate attempt to locate my next of kin.
Australian Consul advises my daughter that I was critically ill and that she should be with me.
Australian Consul issues my daughter with a certificate to ensure minimum delays negotiating customs and immigration.

Thieves in Bangkok systematically milked my bank cards...over 60 transactions.

My daughter, when she arrived worked closely with the Australian Consul to have me transferred to the intensive care ward at a private hospital, and to cancel the Mastercard and Asia Bank cards.

I eventually returned to Australia 7.5 kg lighter in a wheelchair, and now, a year later have physically recovered.

However amongst other issues, I am having much difficulty in dealing with the statement from the insurer. **"We are prohibited from funding any of your health costs in Australia by The Commonwealth of Australia Health Act 1953."**

The smashed teeth costs were incurred out of Australia but the injuries could not be fixed out of Australia because I was critically ill! I offered to go back and have them fixed at the Bangkok Hospital at a later date, but was informed that I now had a pre-existing condition.

The insurers position appears to be supported by the Office of the Victorian Insurance Ombudsman.

I wrote to the insurer requesting clarification for the future regarding cover during domestic legs of international travel, such as transferring from Melbourne to the airline's primary hub in Sydney. In that the Commonwealth Health Act 1953 prohibits the insurer from paying claims within Australia, does it then follow that the medical cover only becomes effective at the point of immigration?
No response was received regarding this query.

Under current conditions it is possible that Australian Seniors and Families who try to do the right thing could be devastated on their return to the country that they "still call home"
(Or even possibly before they leave their country)

There is something fundamentally wrong! In 1953, 54 years ago, there was no such thing as a Jumbo Jet!
Volumes of International Travel were minuscule compared to 2007.

I believe in particular that the Senior Citizens of Australia need to be fully informed of the Prohibitions associated with the Commonwealth Health Act 1953, prior to embarking on an overseas trip. If an Australian Senior was to experience an emergency like mine, then it is possible that when they return to their home country their life savings could be exhausted, when the insurance company informs them of the aforementioned Prohibitions after the event.

I am indeed grateful for the support of Ms. Jenny Macklin MP, who thought it relevant that I should make this submission.

I would be pleased to provide all records for the scrutiny of the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Brian Lyons

Attachments: To follow by mail.....Statement, Letter to Robin Hamilton-Coates, Letter to Jenny Macklin MP