

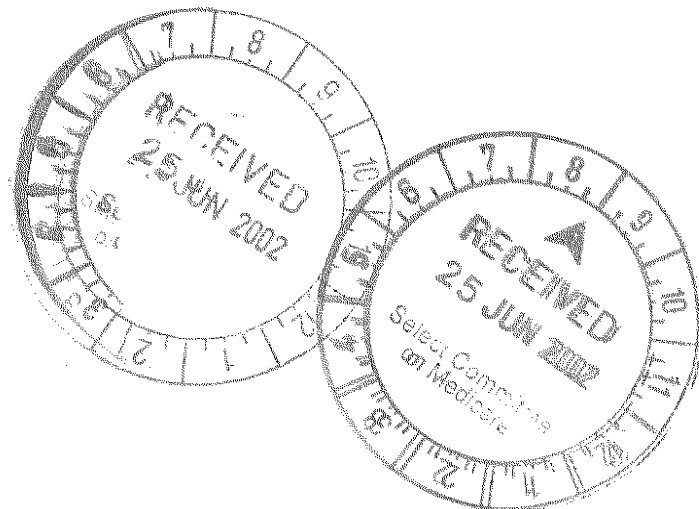
CAIRNS DIVISION OF GENERAL PRACTICE LTD

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10 June 2003

Senator Jan McLucas
Labour Senator for Queensland
PO Box 2733
CAIRNS QLD 4870



Dear Jan

RE: MEDICARE PACKAGE

With a view to providing you with some feedback on the recently announced Medicare Package. The Cairns Division of General Practice has undertaken a survey of our Membership to clarify the level of support for the proposal.

Approximately one third of our GP membership responded to the survey in a very timely matter, which illustrates the degree of concern amongst members of the GP profession.

The results are as follows:

1: 'Opt-in' scheme for GP practices to bulk-bill all concession cardholders.

Response: 90.4% = NO 3.2% don't know, 6.4% not answered

Comments:

The "All or Nothing" approach here will provide little benefit to the health consumer. A halt to the rate of decline in bulk-billing can be achieved without GPs committing to the 'opt-in' proposal. The scheme should have a greater flexibility for GPs to choose which concession cardholders to bulk bill in order to maintain a viable business. The GPs are best positioned to recognize that part of their client base who are the most needy and Bulk Bill accordingly. Whilst the CPI increases in the incentive payments may be seen as a positive it is GP's distrust of all governments' commitment to adequately remunerate the Medicare rebate that is at the heart of their reticence to embrace bulk-billing once again.

Co payments are acceptable in this scheme and should be available to all doctors whether they opt in or not. Private health coverage for gap payments in General Practice should be available to cover all GP consultations.

Your Doctor, Your Health, Your Future

2: **The opt-in scheme is supported by a geographically targeted incentive payment for practices ranging from \$10,250 to \$18,500 per doctor per year.**

Responses: 80.7% = NO 6.4% = Yes 12.9% Not Answered

Comments:

The \$5.30 Payment for RAMA's 3 to 7 should be paid on a monthly basis and credit to the Doctor who supplied the service.

3. **234 additional Government funded medical school placements with all students bonded for 6 years in areas of workforce shortage.**

Responses: 67.7%= YES 19.4% = NO 12.9% Not Answered

Comments:

The 6 year bonding requirement for medical students should be eliminated, 234 placements a good step in the right direction, however more transparency required on how medical school placements are calculated.

4. **150 additional GP registrar placements focused on rural and outer-urban areas.**

Responses: 90.3%=Yes 3.3% = No 6.4% = Not Answered

Comments:

This is a step in the right direction however there needs to be more clarification and transparency on where this workforce is to come from.

5. **Current practice nurse scheme extended to urban GP practices but only if they agree to opt-in to the scheme.**

Responses: 93.5% = No 3.3% = YES 3.3% = Not Answered

Comments:

Agree with the practice nurse scheme however do not agree that having to be in the bulk billing scheme is a requirement to have nurses in practices. All practices should have a practice nurse. The Commonwealth should make a commitment to training nurses and practice staff in cooperation with the appropriate training institutions. Dedicated training practices should be remunerated appropriately for non medical staff training (similar to the GP Training Scheme). Supervisory item numbers could be created for nurses doing duties that the GP sign off on. All practices should be entitled to government support.

6. Opt-in Practices to receive a subsidy to support the implementation of electronic billing: \$1000 for urban practices, \$1500 for non urban.

Responses: 67.7% = NO 25.8% = Yes 6.5% Not Answered

Comments:

The \$1000 to \$1500 is acceptable as a one off payment; however IM/IT maintenance costs are estimated to be \$2500 per full time equivalent GP. This payment would be more appropriate rather than WHP subsidy program to assist electronic billing and other continued government initiatives.

The IM/IT retainer to assist GPs to keep software updated should be supported, at approx \$2500 per FTE per annum.

On the overall question of:

Do you support the entire package of changes proposed by the Prime Minister's Office.

Responses were: 93.6% = No 3.2% = Not sure 3.2% = Not Answered

We trust that this information will clarify the views of local General Practitioners on the proposed Package.

The Division would like to take this opportunity to thank-you for your ongoing support and we look forward to your continued assistance with the development of Primary Health Care in the Cairns.

Yours faithfully



**Dr Garry Hartrick
CHAIR**