

Analysis spurs row

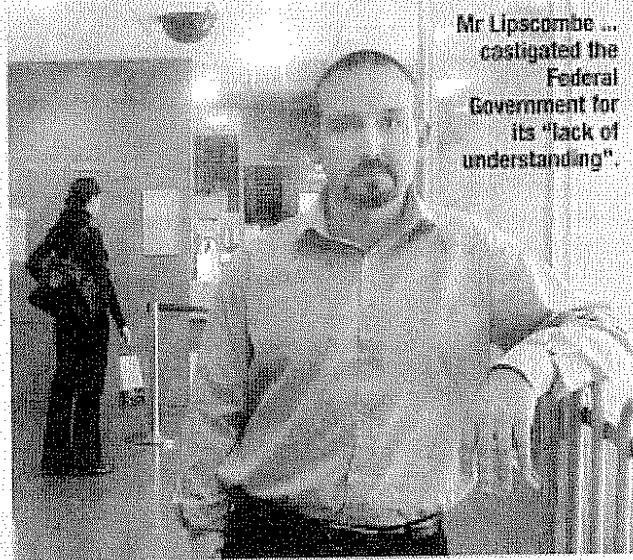
Govt blasted for ignorance

A PRACTICE manager has publicly castigated the Federal Government for its "lack of understanding" of GP issues, after an analysis he wrote for *Australian Doctor* became the subject of a bizarre parliamentary tug-of-war involving even the Prime Minister.

Mark Lipscombe, who wrote the analysis comparing the Coalition and ALP Medicare reform proposals, is now awaiting a visit to his practice from Shadow Health Minister Stephen Smith, after inviting both he and Federal Health Minister Senator Kay Patterson to discuss the issues with him face to face.

After the parliamentary clashes, Mr Lipscombe, practice manager of the 12-doctor Westcare Medical Centre in outer Melbourne, wrote to Mr Smith, Senator Patterson and Federal Minister for Ageing Kevin Andrews, who had raised the *Australian Doctor* article during parliamentary debate to claim that Mr Lipscombe's views supported the government's policy.

The original analysis (*Australian Doctor*, 30 May) concluded that the Coalition's Medicare plan was better for GPs because it allowed them to charge non-concessional patients extra on top of bulk-billing.



Mr Lipscombe ... castigated the Federal Government for its "lack of understanding".

The report was first raised at a Senate estimates committee hearing on Monday 2 June, where Senator Patterson dismissed Mr Lipscombe's views as "showing a lack of understanding of the package".

Two days later, Opposition Leader Simon Crean asked Prime Minister John Howard during Question Time if he was aware of the report and its statement that GP fees for non-concessional patients would rise.

Later the same day it was raised again, this time by Mr Andrews, who claimed the article backed the government's position. Mr Andrews was immediately ridiculed by Mr Smith for what he claimed was a "spectacular own goal".

In the letter to Senator Patterson and Messrs Smith and Andrews, Mr Lipscombe insisted that "the government's proposed package would without any doubt whatsoever result in a significant increase in the fees charged to non-concessional patients".

Contrary to Senator Patterson's dismissal of his views, Mr Lipscombe wrote there was "a glaringly obvious cost to offset" in agreeing to bulk-bill concessional patients under the government's plan. He added that the minister's comments "demonstrate her department's lack of understanding of the mechanics and dynamics of an outer-metropolitan general practice".

Adam Crosswell