

ARARAT MEDICAL CENTRE PTY. LTD.

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GR

The Secretary
Select Committee on Medicare
Suite S1 30
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

20th July 2003

Dear Secretary,

The Ararat Medical Centre is a large general practice in a regional city in Western Victoria. We are a private billing practice, and do not routinely bulk bill any patients.

We are an unopposed practice in the town and the general practitioners care for all the medical needs of the community of approximately 12,000 people. The general practitioners also attend to all emergency presentations at the local district 40-bed hospital and are responsible for all inpatient care at the hospital.

After a recent visit from Senator The Honourable Kay Patterson to discuss implications of the proposed Fairer Medicare Package, we would like to bring to the attention of the Select Committee the following concerns with the proposed changes.

If we were to change from our current position as a fully private billing, fee for service practice, there are two particular concerns that we would like the government to consider.

- 1) The current after hours schedule fee is grossly deficient in providing appropriate recompense for attending an emergency consultation during non-working hours. If we were obliged to bulk bill all Health Care Cardholders and pensioners, we would be effectively reducing our fee for these services considerably. We also feel that people would not think twice before calling a doctor out during the night for a matter that might easily wait until morning because they would have no additional cost for this service.
- 2) As we see our population ageing in the next 10-20 years, we can expect a higher percentage of pensioners and health care cardholders in our community in the future. This will mean that, under the proposed Fairer Medicare package, we might see the percentage of patients who must be bulk billed rise from the present 50%, to levels of 60% - 75% in the years ahead. This would reduce our average fee per consultation and, consequently, would not be economically sustainable.

At present, we see no reason to accept the governments proposed changes to Medicare. If these two issues were dealt with in an acceptable manner, we may then be in a position to look more favourably on the proposed reforms.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Michael Connellan
On behalf of the partners of Ararat Medical Centre
55 High St
ARARAT