

2015

GOVERNMENT REBATE CUT UNDERMINES QUALITY CARE

AMA President A/Prof Brian Owler has emphatically rejected Federal Government claims that a \$20 cut to Medicare rebates for shorter GP consultations due to come into effect next Monday will boost quality care.

In an interview on radio 3AW this morning, Prime Minister Tony Abbott said the AMA had raised concerns about six-minute medicine and, by slashing the rebate for Level B GP consultations lasting less than 10 minutes, the Government was encouraging doctors to spend more time with their patients.

But A/Prof Owler said the rebate cut had nothing to do with improving the quality of care, and everything to do with the Budget bottom line.

"This measure has never been about encouraging quality care or tackling six-minute medicine," the AMA President said. "It is about grabbing \$1.3 billion from patients and family doctors to improve the Budget."

Until now, Medicare rebates for GP services have been classified according to complexity of the service provided. But under the Government's changes, due to come into effect from next Monday, rebates will be adjusted according to how much time doctors spend with their patients. In particular, the Medicare rebate for GP Level B consultations lasting less than 10 minutes will be drastically cut from \$37.05 to \$16.95 – a \$20.10 reduction.

A/Prof Owler said it was a poorly thought-out change that simply pushed more costs onto doctors and their patients.

"This is a Budget cut, not a health policy," he said. "The Government is simply ripping \$1.3 billion out of primary health, and trying to dress it up as some sort of measure to support quality care. "But doctors and their patients can see this for what it is – simply an attempt by the Government to offload more of the cost of care directly onto them."

A/Professor Owler said the AMA was concerned about business models based on the rapid throughput of patients, but the Government's changes were no solution.

He said experienced family doctors were often able to provide quality care in less than 10 minutes, and the focus needed to be on the outcome of care, not how long it takes.

"Often, a GP will spend seven, eight or nine minutes with one patient, and then need to spend 17, 18 or 19 minutes with the next patient," the AMA President said. "Providing quality care is not about watching the clock. It is about giving each patient all the attention and care they need. It is about what care is provided, not how long it takes. "If the Government truly wants to support general practice and encourage longer consultations, it should better fund patients so they can spend more time with their GP."

CONTACT: Odette Visser - (02) 6270 5412 / 0427 209 753