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Transcript: AMA President Dr Michael Gannon, Triple J Hack, 1 February 2017

Subjects: Google health cards

TOM TILLEY: Alright, let's see what the medical community thinks about what Google is doing in the health space. Dr Michael Gannon is the President of the Australian Medical Association, which is the most powerful group representing doctors in Australia. Michael, thank you for joining us.

MICHAEL GANNON: It's a pleasure, Tom.

TOM TILLEY: We also have Associate Professor Jane Burns, who's the CEO of Young and Well, in the studio, and they focus on technological support for mental health and wellbeing for young people. Jane, thank you as well. Michael, to you first, do you think this is a good or a bad development?

MICHAEL GANNON: Oh, I think it's potentially a very positive development. We know that already it's a very common reason for people to get on the web, it's not there just to buy shoes, and they can often get some very useful information. But the use of search engines - and the word Dr Google entered our vernacular at least 10 years ago - often leads people to be a lot more anxious. To see higher quality information afforded to patients can only be a positive.

TOM TILLEY: Does it worry you that it means people won't go out and see real doctors?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, I think that there's a smaller danger of that with the quality of information that I've seen in the examples produced. The truth is that modern search engines almost invariably have people diagnosed with leukaemia, which I'm sure makes them quite stressed out. To have higher quality information, to improve health literacy is not at all threatening to doctors. There's plenty of positives in this move.

TOM TILLEY: Jane, what do you think?

JANE BURNS: Oh look, I think it's an absolute smart move on Google's behalf. It's about the right care, right time, right treatment. And the fact that they're the biggest tech company in the world, and they've partnered with some of the biggest health providers, ensures that the quality of the information is correct.

And I think what's really clear from- certainly in the mental health space is we actually have a major challenge in getting people into the right care at the right time so if this enhances mental health literacy then that's a great thing. Certainly, [previous interviewee] Melissa's right, young people have been reaching out to the internet and to technologies for an extremely long time.

In 1997, *ReachOut.com* was the first mental health service online, and I think if we can get the pathways to care right and if people do need to go in and see a GP, then that's a good thing, they get in early. But our major challenge is that people with depression, anxiety, they are not getting into care in a timely manner and as a result they fall through the cracks.

TOM TILLEY: Michael, we're getting a few texts in from people saying that what they found out online was right and their real life doctor was wrong. What do you make of those situations?

MICHAEL GANNON: I think that that will happen from time to time and a common complaint from patients is delay in diagnosis or incorrect diagnosis. It's going to be far more likely the case that the doctors are right, but we need to be sensitive to the ideas that patients are seeking more information, and we need to listen when they present with symptoms.

One of the challenges for a lot of doctors these days is that, you know, the health system's probably not funded to the extent that it needs to be and it means that a lot of doctors don't have the time to spend with patients they should.

TOM TILLEY: Well, that's a really interesting point, because this could actually potentially ease that burden, couldn't it? If people are able to get more information online, it might mean less unnecessary visits to doctors?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, one important point that I would like to make is that you've got to be very careful talking about unnecessary visits to doctors. We never want there to be any barrier to people accessing care.

Sure, from time to time, it's going to be what the doctor might think is a nuisance presentation. I can tell you I have days where some of the questions aren't all that helpful, aren't all that useful, I find myself getting grumpy or tired, but that doesn't mean they're not important questions for the patients to ask. So, we've got to get past this idea that people have unnecessary visits to doctors, have unnecessary tests.

But information is power. If patients are armed with better information about their treatment choices, this might be used to enhance the care provided by doctors.

TOM TILLEY: Alright, Michael, Jane, great to have you both on the show. Thanks for joining us.

JANE BURNS: Thank you.

MICHAEL GANNON: Thank you.

TOM TILLEY: That's Michael Gannon from the AMA and Jane Burns from Young and Well.

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