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NEW PROPOSAL TO DELIVER BETTER HEALTH CARE TO 450,000 AUSTRALIANS WITH CHRONIC WOUNDS

A proposal to overhaul Medicare rebates for patients with chronic wounds will help GPs deliver better health care and shorten healing times for their patients afflicted with chronic or difficult to heal wounds, AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today.

The Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Taskforce, which is reviewing more than 5,700 MBS items, has been looking at how best to manage both acute and chronic wounds to improve health outcomes while providing value to patients and the healthcare system.

The MBS Review Wound Management Working Group Report has recommended new MBS items for GPs to undertake initial assessment and review of hard-to-heal wounds, including ulcers and post-surgical wounds, or wounds at risk of becoming chronic.

It has also recommended allowing GPs to bulk bill patients while recovering the cost of the bandages and other consumables used for the treatment, with a Commonwealth-funded reimbursement scheme for patients.

“It is estimated that approximately 450,000 Australians live with a chronic wound, costing the health system about \$3 billion a year,” Dr Bartone said.

“If these patients do not get best practice wound care, it can take months and, in some cases, even years, not weeks, for wounds to heal. Wounds can recur, patients can be hospitalised, and procedures can be carried out that could have been avoided with best practice care.

“The AMA has long campaigned to convince policy makers that current MBS arrangements fail to recognise the importance of wound care and the benefits for patients and the health system if timely healing of wounds is supported and promoted.

“Wound care can be expensive, with the cost of some of the consumables used – including bandages, dressings, and ointments – creating a prohibitive barrier to the most appropriate care for some patients.

“Under current arrangements, a GP cannot bulk bill a patient and charge them for the cost of consumables, meaning that the GP must choose between charging the patient a consultation fee or absorbing the cost of dressings.

“The Working Group recommendation will allow GPs to recover the cost of dressings for bulk billed patients. This already happens with vaccinations, and the proposal to extend this approach to wound care is welcome.

“The AMA also welcomes the proposal to introduce a wound consumables reimbursement scheme for patients who are unable to afford extra costs.

“Evidence-based wound care is cost effective, minimises healing time, and provides savings to both patients and the health system. This is not only sensible but will save time and money in the long run.

“The recommendations support a GP-led approach to wound care that would ensure patients and their wounds are appropriately assessed, treated, and reviewed,” Dr Bartone said.

The AMA Submission to the MBS Review Wound Management Working Group Report is available at <https://ama.com.au/submission/final-ama-supplementary-submission-mbs-review-wound-management-working-group>

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