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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, ABC News Channel, *News Breakfast with Michael Rowland and Lisa Millar*, Thursday, 14 May 2020

Subject: Delayed diagnoses during COVID-19; potential second wave of infections

MICHAEL ROWLAND: As restrictions around the country continue to ease, there are fears, not only about a second wave of the virus, but a flood of delayed illnesses that would otherwise have been diagnosed during the shutdown. Figures show doctors' visits are down, and pathology tests are down by 40 per cent as well.

For more, Australian Medical Association President, Tony Bartone, joins us now from Melbourne. Tony, great to see you. So, is the health system, are GPs bracing for a potentially busy time in the next few weeks and months?

TONY BARTONE: Michael, it's not that we're bracing for a busy time, but we know that at some stage in the future, we're going to see a lot of delayed presentations through illnesses and other health conditions that haven't been managed, that haven't presented for the usual care, or indeed haven't been diagnosed in the first place, leading to further complications. And obviously, the need for increased intervention and increased management and increased therapy, and obviously delayed outcomes in that space, are putting our patients at risk.

We know that, during this time, people have put off going to the doctor, put off dealing with a concern or a niggle or an unexpected or new developing pain or a new developing spot on their arm, saying, that either: doctors are too busy with COVID at the moment, or that we don't want to risk the chance of picking up a COVID infection. And in fact, there's never probably been a safer, more appropriate time to go to the doctors, to get to see your medical practitioner, whatever the case may be.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Okay. And that's a very important point, Tony. So therefore, GPs, medical centres, are ready to take on these people who may have been fearful of going there in the past?

TONY BARTONE: Absolutely, Michael. So, basically we're ready and waiting. Our waiting rooms are cleaner than ever, you might say. Infection control has been ramped up to the nth degree, social distancing measures are in place, we triage our patients before they present to the clinic, we've got separate entrances for respiratory cases.

Our capacity's extremely idle at the moment, even with Telehealth consultations to take care of the vulnerable, the ones that can't come down for whatever reasons, especially the elderly or the immunocompromised or suppressed patients.

There are absolutely all measures in place to ensure that there is absolutely zero possibility of being exposed unnecessarily to anything. If it's safe enough to catch a tram, safe enough to go to the supermarket, if it's safe enough to go to cafes and restaurants in groups of 10; it's certainly safe enough to go see your doctor. Don't put off seeing them, because obviously you're putting your health at risk.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Good point. Just before you go, on coronavirus, Tony, what advice has the AMA got on the dangers, and I guess, extent of a second wave of the virus?

TONY BARTONE: Let's be very clear about this. We have won the first phase, the first round, the first quarter, whatever analogy you want to use. The coronavirus is still present and prevalent in the community. Yes, it's in extremely low numbers, but it would only take one slip-up to get an outbreak, a hotspot, and then from there, anything could happen, if not managed appropriately.

We've got our contact tracing capacity ramped up fully, we've got our COVIDSafe app, we've got our diagnostic testing capacity really ramped up, we've got PPE, we've got everything else in place to deal

with it; but it requires the community to take a very slow, vigilant, cautious approach. It's not party time; the virus is still present, and we've got to deal with it for a very long time to come.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Tony Bartone, AMA President, thank you so much for joining us on *Breakfast*.

14 May 2020

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