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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, 3AW, *Breakfast with Ross Stevenson and John Burns*, Friday, 29 March 2019

Subject: Pharmacy Guild putting profits ahead of patients

ROSS STEVENSON: I want to get this story straight, so let's go straight to Tony Bartone, President of the Federal AMA. Good morning to you, Tony.

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Ross.

ROSS STEVENSON: Is this the story? That the Federal Government planned in the next Budget to change it so that you didn't have to keep going back to a doctor every month and a chemist every month to get a common script filled like high blood pressure medication - you could do it every two months? But that plan's been scrapped?

TONY BARTONE: Essentially that's correct, Ross. So, in cases, 140 specific medicines or so where the patient's well-controlled and the doctor assesses that they have the ability to have a longer period between reviews, they could write a larger script-sized packet which would really say to the patient – they would only have to go to the pharmacist every two months instead of every month and only pay one set of prescription fees every two months, rather than every month, saving the patient and saving the Government money.

ROSS STEVENSON: Well, that's just a splendid idea. So the Federal Government has now reversed its decision, it's not going to do that. It must have done so out of concern for patient welfare?

TONY BARTONE: One would have hoped so. But I can't see how that really can be justified when this decision, communication of this decision - the reversal - had been made after a very large full page ad taken up by the Guild yesterday in the morning dailies. So-

ROSS STEVENSON: [Interrupts] I had my tongue in my cheek a little. They have done it because they have been lobbied by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

TONY BARTONE: That's absolutely correct.

ROSS STEVENSON: So, notwithstanding that it would be a real benefit to patients to not have to pay every month for their script, they wouldn't have to go to a chemist every month notwithstanding; it'd be really good for them. The Federal Government has caved in because they've been lobbied out of it.

TONY BARTONE: That's absolutely correct. And to be very clear, these patients are well-controlled, well-managed, buying into their own management plan. You can safely say that they don't need to go every month, there are no unexpected alterations in their condition, and if there are, they're well informed, they'll come back, they'll tell you. They could've saved themselves a trip, a set of either \$6.50 or \$40.50 depending on if they're concession or not concession, and the Government would've saved \$7.29 every month.

ROSS STEVENSON: So was any reason given by the Pharmacy Guild for this lobbying? Did they say, for example, that we're trying to prevent people over-abusing prescription medicine?

TONY BARTONE: In the ad, it clearly references that it would affect the viability of many thousands of community pharmacies, and that was the only reason in the ad that was put. There is no clinical reason to-

ROSS STEVENSON: [Talks over] So in effect, people- in effect, people who are on those sorts of medications are subsidising chemists?

TONY BARTONE: Well, in effect, this is part of the health system that we have. Those people that have the- are expected to pay, we know that out-of-pocket costs, when it comes to Australians, up to 37 per cent of the out-of-pocket costs come from expenditure on medicines.

ROSS STEVENSON: Tony, nice to chat with you. Tony Bartone. They're a hardy bunch, our politicians, aren't they?

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