NEWS RELEASE

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

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GPs urged to consider options under Medicare Package

Dr Rob Walters, Chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice, today urged GPs to carefully consider their choices under the Government's proposed Medicare package, likely to be announced next week.

The Divisions of General Practice Network is Australia's largest GP organisation. 95% of GPs are members of a Division of General Practice.

"The proposed Medicare package is likely to contain some major changes to the ways in which general practice is financed in Australia. We understand that GPs will have a choice whether to 'opt in' to the package and receive incentive payments for bulkbilling concessional patients, with the option of charging other patients a co-payment, or to 'opt out' and continue to practice as normal.

"These options will impact upon GPs differently depending upon their geographical area of service, patient mix and current billing practices. Therefore, we expect there to be a divergence of views about the package among the profession and each individual GP will have to decide which option is best for them and their patients.

"Once the details of the package are announced, ADGP and the local Divisions of General Practice will be working hard to provide GPs with the information and support they need to make their decision.

"ADGP will be engaging an experienced health economist to look in detail at the package and prepare business case studies to provide GPs with reliable and robust information about how the package will impact upon them," Dr Walters said.

Dr Walters also stressed the need for other measures to be introduced to support all GPs, regardless of whether they opt in or opt out of the new package.

"To ensure Australia has a sustainable primary care system for the future this package needs to address more than just GP financing issues. For example, GP groups have been saying for sometime that Australia has a serious GP shortage. Any increase in medical school places and post-graduate GP training places in this package will be welcomed by GPs and the community.

"For general practice to be an attractive career option for medical students, the Government must also recognise and address the day to day issues confronting general practice, such as increasing and streamlining support for quality initiatives, reducing red tape and ensuring that medical indemnity insurance is affordable and meets the needs of both GPs and their patients.

"ADGP has also called for an extension of the existing Practice Nurse Incentive Program to urban areas, to relieve the pressure that urban GPs face, particularly in outer-metropolitan areas. Increasing the number of practice nurses working alongside GPs would take the pressure off already overworked and stressed GPs and increase community access to primary care," Dr Walters said.

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