



NEWS RELEASE

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

03/40

6/8/2003

Labor Party Medicare Ads a “Dummy Bid” to the electorate

Dr Rob Walters, Chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice, today said that GPs were deeply offended by the Labor Party’s Medicare advertisement suggesting that doctors would sell their services to the highest bidder.

The advertisement shows a nurse in a crowded doctor’s waiting room auctioning off GP services to waiting patients.

“The suggestion that doctors care more about money than the health of their patients is highly insulting to Australian GPs. GPs are committed to providing high quality care to all their patients and, as a matter of course, discount their fees for those who have difficulties paying,” Dr Walters said.

“In fact 85% of pensioners are currently bulk billed by doctors, despite the fact that the Medicare rebate is grossly inadequate to meet rising practice costs. For far too long, the altruism of GPs has been the only thing holding Australia’s ailing health system together.

“The fact is that Governments from both sides of the political fence have failed to invest in general practice, leaving GPs with few options but to reduce their rates of bulk billing, simply to remain sustainable.

“General practice is currently struggling under financial pressure, due to the high costs of running a practice, rising premiums for medical insurance, increasing rates of chronic disease in the community and fewer GPs left to care for an ageing population. Unless these issues are addressed, general practice will become even less accessible to many in the community.

“The Labor Party needs to remember that access is about more than bulk billing - it is also about addressing the overall GP shortage in Australia. Many rural, regional and outer urban areas of Australia simply do not have enough doctors to meet community needs.

“We cannot talk about increasing access to GP services unless we can get doctors working in these areas in the first place.

“Divisions of General Practice support a comprehensive approach to increasing access and affordability of GP services to the community, including increasing the overall number of GPs and supporting a ‘team approach’ to general practice, through increased funding for practice nurses and other support staff.

“Therefore, I welcome the Labor Party’s commitment to expanding the Government’s current practice nurse subsidies into urban areas in order to increase access to general practice for urban communities.

“However, given this commitment, it is very disappointing that Labor has chosen to misrepresent doctors in this unfair, negative and offensive manner. I believe the electorate will reject Labor’s attempt to score cheap political points instead of addressing the real issues affecting general practice,” Dr Walters said.

For comment:

Dr Rob Walters, Chair, ADGP 0418 127 123

For further information:

Jennifer Doggett, Communications Manager 02 6228 0822 or 0403 325 980