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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, on *ABC News breakfast with Michael Rowland and Lisa Millar*, Wednesday, 30 June 2021

Subject: Age and AstraZeneca vaccine.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Let's turn to the vaccine rollout now. Australia's top medical body is refusing to endorse the Prime Minister's announcement, allowing Australians under 40 to get the AstraZeneca jab. AMA President Omar Khorshid joins us now from Perth. Dr Khorshid, good morning. Why can't you back this move?

OMAR KHORSHID: Morning, Michael. So I think I need to be a little clearer here. We don't actually have a problem with removing the restrictions on age that the Prime Minister's done. The issue is the confused messaging and of course, no notice to GPs who were inundated with calls yesterday.

So, just to be completely clear, the advice has not changed. The Government are not changing the advice. They're not suggesting that ATAGI is wrong. So the experts are recommending people under the age of 60 have the Pfizer vaccine. The PM simply removed the age restrictions on AZ, and that means that those people who believe that they'd like to, on balancing those risks, still have AZ, it is now available, as it has been for healthcare workers under the age of 60 and others in those priority groups. So right since the first ATAGI decision.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Okay. But in saying that, do you believe the ATAGI advice which, as you say, is still that Pfizer is the preferred vaccine for everyone under 60 should trump what the Prime Minister has announced on Monday night?

OMAR KHORSHID: Well, I don't think it's a matter of trumping it, but there have been a lot of people in the community saying that they want any vaccine they can get. A lot of younger people are saying that they can't understand why our older Australians are so reluctant, and they are wanting to do their bit to support the vaccine program and Australia's target of being vaccinated by the end of the year. That's a good thing. And as long as they understand the risks associated, it is within their rights to be vaccinated, and the PM's made that available. But the ATAGI advice is the key bit of information here. For those under the age of 60, they've done the risk analysis for us. They have said that, in Australia's context, in the size of the outbreaks that we're likely to get, that the preferred vaccine is the Pfizer vaccine due to the very tiny but significant risk of the TTS syndrome.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Okay. So, feasibly, quite feasibly, you could see GPs deferring to the ATAGI advice when people under 40 come to see them wanting the AstraZeneca jab?

OMAR KHORSHID: Well, doctors make decisions in conjunction with their patients. And there have been some GPs refusing to offer the AZ vaccine over the last few weeks to people who have asked for it, who don't fit in the recommended age groups because they didn't feel able to do so. By really making clear that doctors are covered and by making the vaccine formally available to all Australians, I think GPs will now understand that it is possible, but they will have to have that conversation with a patient and ensure that they understand.

Will it mean every GP will offer AZ to under 60s or under 40s? Probably not. I think some GPs will say: look, I'm not willing to do something that's against the expert advice. But many GPs are already willing to offer it, and I think they'll feel more comfortable to do so since the PM's announcement.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Okay. What do you make of where we sit this week? There have been concerns already about the messaging. We do know there are concerns about vaccine hesitancy. Has the messaging been not that great from your perspective?

OMAR KHORSHID: Yeah, unfortunately, this is one of the criticisms that the AMA does agree with of the Government's rollout of the vaccine, is that the messaging has really been mixed, and I think Australians don't know which way is up when it comes to the vaccine program.

We'd really like to see some money being put into positive advertising program to change the general feeling around our vaccine program. This is not something that we just do for ourselves; it's actually something that we do for others in the community, for the vulnerable. If we can turn this thing into a national priority where everyone is jumping on board, it is effectively like a war, so let's take that war footing and encourage everyone to do the right thing because it's the right thing to do. But also, I think, talking more to the medical profession before new announcements, would certainly be helpful because we can help the Government avoid some of these pitfalls.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Yeah, greater communication needed there clearly as well. Dr Omar Khorshid, thank you.

OMAR KHORSHID: Cheers, Michael.

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