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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Chris Moy, Outlet: ABC News Breakfast, Thursday, 16 December 2021

Subject: Vaccine booster rollout

HOST: Michael Rowland

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Now, the Australian Medical Association is also raising concerns this morning about the booster vaccine rollout, as we confront the prospect of a very large spike in infections. The AMA's Vice President Dr Chris Moy joins us now. Dr Moy, good morning.

CHRIS MOY: Good morning, Michael.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: What are your main concerns? What's the Association's main concerns about the booster rollout?

CHRIS MOY: Look, just as we're seeing this incredible explosion of cases in places like the UK - and I've got to say, I've just been in touch with our son, and, you know, they can't for the life of them get a vaccine because of the fact that they've dismantled a lot of their vaccination machinery. We're very concerned that we are facing a perfect storm where, in fact, we've been going- we may be going backwards in our vaccination efforts. Now, it's not the number vaccines and it's not the, you know, the ability to have the vaccines. Our problem is, is that we have a situation where the mass-vax clinics, which are state-run, are trying to roll back because they're trying to get their staff back to the front line. And also, there's been an effective reduction in support for GPs to continue to provide booster shots. Now we really want GPs to keep going, because they've been the sort of foundation. They've done 24 million out of the 40 million or so shots done so far, and got us through particularly that really, you know, tricky AstraZeneca part. But what we really need is to continue the sort of level of support, because unfortunately, there are GPs contacting me regularly saying they just can't keep going because they've been already doing it on the smell of an oily rag. And especially now, particularly with the extra burden of having to vaccinate children, which is actually going to be more difficult than adults because of the consenting, and, you know, the logistics of vaccinating children, we are really concerned that we're going to go- we're going backwards, really, and we can't go into denial about this. We've got to keep moving forward with the vaccination program.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Okay, the GPs are overwhelmed, as you say. And based on your conversations with them, I have to tell you, Chris, a lot of our- especially our rural and regional viewers, have told us over the course of the week that they are struggling to get appointments with their GPs and their pharmacists, and have to wait well beyond their scheduled third dose date. So what's the solution? What do you want the state and territory governments to, as much as they can, keep these state-based hubs open?

CHRIS MOY: Well, we do want the state-based hubs to try and stay open, but we also need- and I've got to say, the department itself has been very good in terms of organising the

vaccinations. But our problem is more the fact that the general practice support is effectively dropping from about \$33 per shot down to \$24 a shot. Now, I know people think, oh, well, just keep going, but it's already been essentially a loss thing for a lot of GPs. And for them to continue at that level... I mean, you might, you know, certainly I pay a lot more for my haircut than that. But also the Australian Tax Department have actually worked out that it costs them \$27 to \$30 to put out a paper invoice - a paper invoice. So, you know, really, asking GPs, who have really been the foundation of the vaccination program, to keep going at the moment at that level, is really asking a lot. Now, we do- please, we ask every GP to try and keep going if they can, but it is a big ask at the moment. And what we need is the Government to back us in, because they've done well in backing us in so far. We need to be backed in because we are facing something, you know, very difficult. Now, a lot of people are saying about Omicron, gee, it may be milder. But, yes, it may be, but the UK are doing their modelling and saying the same. So if it's, you know, half a serious, half as many people end up in hospital, but it's, you know, multiple times more infectious, you're still going to get a massive peak in cases where even a small percentage of those people ending up in hospital is going to potentially really overwhelm the system.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Yeah.

CHRIS MOY: So really, this is a time not to be stepping back. It's time to be stepping forward with the vaccination program.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Okay, so something for the Federal Government to think about there, as you say, in terms of financial support for GPs. Just before you go, and I want to preface this by- Chris Moy, by saying, Twitter can be a wild place. But I've just seen a tweet from Dr Nick Coatsworth, who, as you know, is the former Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Australia. This is what he said, and he's related it to the AMA statement about Omicron. Three weeks into the Omicron variant, the peanut gallery association, as he describes the AMA, decides we're behind again. How are those memberships going, he asks? What do you make of that?

CHRIS MOY: Look- well, what I'd say is that- well the thing is, what do we know about Omicron at the moment? I mean, I accept that Nick has said, for example, that we should just let it rip and get everybody infected. But what do we know about Omicron at the moment? And for us to say that at the moment, we've done about 200,000 of and by the end of- 200,000, booster shots. So by the end of the month, we need to have done four million, will be eligible. How do we do that? And I'd- what I would say is that with the Omicron variant, although it is looking, at this stage at the numbers that on a per person case it does look more mild, we still have these variables that we do not understand. How many people are going to end up in hospital in one go and the other thing is, how many people are going to potentially have things like long COVID? We do not know enough to be sure. And we should be taking the precautionary process of moving forward and vaccinating hard at the moment, as we have throughout. Because it's one of our greatest weapons, apart from potential restrictions that Nancy has brought up in the previous interview.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Okay. Hey, Chris Moy, really appreciate your time this morning. All the best.

CHRIS MOY: it's a pleasure.

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