

# TRANSCRIPT

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## Transcript: AMA Queensland President, Dr Nick Yim, ABC Radio Sunshine Coast, *Drive with Sarah Howells*, Tuesday 4 February 2025

### Subject: GP referrals

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**SARAH HOWELLS:** Let's say you go to your GP for a referral to see a specialist. Maybe a cardiologist, maybe you need a referral to see a physio. The referral lasts a year but you're still not better. So after 12 months you go back to your GP for another referral, and when you see the same specialist again, you're slugged with another initial consult fee, which really could be hundreds of dollars despite having already paid this fee at the start of your treatment. Is that legal? Dr Nick Yim is the President of the Australian Medical Association Queensland. Good afternoon.

**DR NICK YIM:** Good afternoon Sarah.

**SARAH HOWELLS:** Can specialists charge more than one initial consultation fee?

**DR NICK YIM:** I think this is quite a complex situation. Under Medicare, if there's a change in a person's situation, that does warrant a new consultation. But to backtrack a little bit, I think I can understand the frustration of your listeners where you have to go back to a GP to get a referral every 12 months.

I think the key thing here is often when a GP refers to a non-GP specialist, it's a clinical handover. It's a handover of clinical information because a lot can change in a 12-month period. For example, medications could change. Someone with heart disease could develop other conditions like diabetes or a cancer, for example. It's always important to keep the specialists involved and GPs up-to-date with the relevant changes of the past 12 months.

**SARAH HOWELLS:** But surely if you're going back to the same specialist that you've already been seeing, they know of the changes?

**DR NICK YIM:** Not necessarily. I'm a GP, so I like to see that when I work for my patients, my specialist colleagues, we kind of collate all the information together. So we might refer to a cardiologist and their subspecialty is heart, and then we might refer to an oncologist which is a cancer specialist. So the GP will often collate a lot of this information and tee up the whole team together to make sure everyone's on the same page to ensure the best care for that individual patient.

**SARAH HOWELLS:** So why do patients need to go back to the GP for another referral if that health concern is the same and ongoing?

**DR NICK YIM:** It's an update of the medical history. At the same time, if it is a chronic long-term condition and nothing's really changing, that individual patient can have that conversation with their long-term GP, because there are avenues in place where people may have a longer referral or even an indefinite referral if it satisfies their chronicity.

**SARAH HOWELLS:** So, under what kind of circumstances could you get a referral that's longer than 12 months?

**DR NICK YIM:** Without picking and choosing, there are some conditions where if it's quite stable, nothing's changing, that can be valid for indefinite referrals.

**SARAH HOWELLS:** There's something to be said about finding the right medical specialist for you and things that work for individuals. If a patient is unhappy with their treatment, can they see another specialist, and then would they have to pay the new patient fee yet again?

**DR NICK YIM:** I think this is one of the different aspects. So yes, they will be valid for an initial fee rebate, but I always encourage my patients if they want a second opinion or even a third opinion, I would really recommend that. Because a patient needs to be happy with the diagnosis and also with the management plan moving forward to ensure quality care.

**SARAH HOWELLS:** All right, and look, if someone is worried that they've been charged the incorrect fee, what should they do?

**DR NICK YIM:** I think the first point of call is to have that conversation with the practice manager. Whether it be that non-GP specialist or the GP practice to have that conversation, because there's often miscommunication involved, especially from the fee perspective.

**SARAH HOWELLS:** All right. Dr Nick Yim, thank you so much for the chat this afternoon.

**DR NICK YIM:** Always a pleasure.

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