AMA

MEDIA RELEASE

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AMA submission: Current informed financial consent should be maintained

Efforts to improve informed financial consent (IFC) should continue to focus on education and professional guidelines, the AMA said today.

In a submission to a Department of Health, Disability and Ageing consultation on IFC and fee transparency, the AMA said it was widely acknowledged that the vast majority of practitioners are doing the right thing and are committed to providing patients with information about the costs of care before it is delivered.

“There will be occasions where IFC is more difficult, as the course of medical treatment can be uncertain, such as in the case of complications or emergencies,” Dr McMullen said.

“Care also needs to be taken that any IFC reforms don’t create the misconception that a lot of doctors are dishonest because that is simply not the case. Doctors have become a handy target for some people in discussions about the cost of healthcare but it is the patchwork and piecemeal nature of Medicare funding that drives the growing out-of-pocket costs.

“The last thing anyone needs is the creation of a new regulatory regime that involves doctors and patients in unnecessary disputes and drives up compliance costs. A profession-led model that focuses on good practice and supports patients and doctors alike is a much better approach.

“Many in our profession are already feeling disheartened and distressed, in part due to recent publicity around specialist fees that has painted an inaccurate picture of why out-of-pocket costs have grown.”

Dr McMullen said the AMA’s submission was in-line with its existing position statement on IFC — which says IFC is a sound ethical, professional and business practice that should apply to all registered health practitioners.

As the department’s consultation paper notes: Professional codes and guidance materials issued by bodies such as the Medical Board of Australia (MBA) and the Australian Medical Association (AMA) emphasise that discussing fees and likely out-of-pocket costs with patients, prior to treatment, is an important element of good medical practice and supports patient autonomy and shared decision-making.

“The AMA recommends that IFC be provided to patients in writing before a planned procedure or treatment is performed and specialties like general practice advise patient’s verbally about likely costs or through publicly available information like websites,” Dr McMullen added.

“The Medical Costs Finder website also provides information on informed financial consent for patients, including a link to the AMA Guide to Informed Financial Consent and will also soon provide more information on

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individual specialist fees, and the rebates provided by individual private health insurers, for the benefits of patients. The AMA has supported these changes."

Read the AMA Guide to Informed Financial Consent 2024

Read the AMA position statement on informed financial consent 2024

Read the AMA position statement on setting medical fees and billing practices 2024

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