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**Transcript: AMA President Dr Michael Gannon with Glen Bartholomew  
 ABC News Radio ‘Evenings’  
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**Subjects: Election outcome, Medicare, new Government health policy**

**GLEN BARTHOLOMEW :** Although many concede the ALP ran what amounted to a scare campaign over Medicare in the Federal election, it's also apparent that it was an area that did determine how some people voted. Today, in an attempt to show he's heard the message from voters at the weekend election, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull says that he now understands that there are concerns about his government's approach to health policy.

**[Malcolm Turnbull excerpt]**

*Many Australians were troubled by, believed it or at least had anxieties raised with them, and it is very clear, it is very, very clear that Barnaby and I and our colleagues have to work harder to rebuild or strengthen the trust of the Australian people in our side of politics when it comes to health. There is no question about that. There was some fertile ground in which that grotesque lie could be sown. There is no doubt about that. But for us we have to recognise that a material number of Australians were sufficiently concerned about our commitment to Medicare that they changed their vote and that is something we need to address.*

**[Excerpt ends]**

**GLEN BARTHOLOMEW :** Malcolm Turnbull speaking earlier today. Opposition Leader Bill Shorten had some suggestions ready to go if Mr Turnbull wanted to back up his words with actions.

**[Bill Shorten excerpt]**

*Here's a four-point plan, Malcolm. Don't increase the price of prescription medicine. Improve the funding offer to hospitals to match Labor. Don't cut the bulk billing incentives for X-rays and blood tests, and unfreeze the GP rebate. That will be an act of trust.*

**[Excerpt ends]**

- GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : Let's get a medical view. We're joined now by Dr Michael Gannon, the President of the Australian Medical Association. Good evening to you.
- MICHAEL GANNON: Good evening.
- GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : The Prime Minister, there, offering a bit of a mea culpa on health without really explaining what he thinks he got wrong. Where do you think the Government went wrong in health policy?
- MICHAEL GANNON: Well, I think that I'd have to agree with most of Mr Shorten's comments in the grab you just played there.
- I said myself on Sunday this comment that the Prime Minister's come up with today, that the previous Coalition policies were the fertile ground for the scare campaign. If we go back to the first co-payment model in 2014, which came out of the much-maligned Budget that year, if we look at Co-payment Mark II which came out later that year, it possibly showed that health policy was being run out of Treasury. What we think that the Coalition has realised maybe too late is that people do worry about their health, they do vote on it, they do regard it as one of the major issues when they decide how to vote.
- GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : So, you point out that perhaps the Prime Minister couldn't be too surprised by the people's suspicion, at least, if he's attempted to bring in a couple of measures that the previous government, at least, with Joe Hockey in particular championing some of these co-payment measures, that it was more about looking at a more user pays approach to the system - and that's the fertile ground that people say, *'look, maybe something's going on here'*.
- MICHAEL GANNON: Well, I think he acknowledged that. And there was never any suggestion that anyone was even remotely looking at privatising Medicare. The only comments that anyone made during the campaign was the fact that it's long overdue to look at the payments system. And, sadly, that was extended to be made out that there was some threat to what we hold dear about Medicare - and that is universal health care: subsidised visits to the GP, free public hospital care. They are things that the Australian people hold dear. They are things which should enjoy bipartisan support. The Prime Minister, the Coalition, have had the scare of their life. If they do survive, it's time for them to listen about how elements of their health policy could be improved, and let's start with number one - unfreezing the rebate.

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : That's going to be a big hit to the Budget's bottom line, of course.

MICHAEL GANNON: Yes. Look, it's important, too, that we - bodies like the AMA - advocate responsibly when they ask for extra funds in the environment we find ourselves in. One thing that I'm happy to applaud is the Coalition's desire to try and get the Budget back into surplus. The nation cannot continue to live on the credit card. But, equally, I would make the point that the health system is value for money. It makes people more productive, it makes them healthier, it gets them back to work, and it means that grandparents can help out with children so that their children can get back to work. The health system's an investment in the economy and, even if we look at the total cost of the health system, it's only six per cent of the health budget that goes to financing primary care and the work of GPs. They do all the heavy lifting in terms of preventable health. There are smart ways to invest in the health system and that's an investment in the economy.

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : There's speculation today that, as a result of Mr Turnbull's comments, that perhaps the current Health Minister Sussan Ley might be sacrificed. Is that appropriate in your view or is that just shooting the messenger or scapegoating?

MICHAEL GANNON: I've always enjoyed my interactions with Minister Ley. I know that she's someone who cares deeply about her constituency and I think cares deeply about patients all around Australia. I think that previously, perhaps to her cost, she expressed a personal view that the rebate freeze should be unwound. She's someone who enjoys my support. I've enjoyed my dealings with her. For that matter, I've enjoyed my dealings with Catherine King.

The AMA is prepared to work with the Coalition, with the Labor Party, with the crossbench, to try and come up with health policy that's good over the next three years. And we're particularly determined to come up with health policy that will serve this nation for 10, 15 years into the future.

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : Sussan Ley did have a bit of a mess to clean up when she took over with all the co-payment debacles, but is it fair to say she was missing in the campaign. Is that why, though, they probably sat on her a bit after that rogue (sic) comment?

MICHAEL GANNON: Look, I'm not a political commentator, but I did notice from time to time that Minister Ley seemed to be absent from the campaign.

It's fair to say that the ALP always regards health as a strength. That's what their own private polling always tells them. I don't think we'll ever see the Liberal Party or the National Party go to a Federal election again without having a very, very strong health policy. I don't think they will. I think they will have learned their lesson.

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : Is it enough to say just the mere words today – *'I feel your pain, and we hear the message'* - or does that really need to be backed up with some concrete measures and changes?

MICHAEL GANNON: Whoever is elected in the next 10 or 14 days is going to need to show a lot of leadership because they're almost certainly going to be leading a minority government. That is going to involve a lot of compromise, it's going to involve a lot of listening, and it's going to involve a lot of things that doctors do every day - forming partnerships, trying to come up with the best treatment plan. I think that the Prime Minister has had the scare of his life and, if he is returned, I think he'll be looking to hear ways that he can come up with an improved health policy. The Australian people have shown how dearly they hold it.

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : Fair to say that the medical profession might feel a bit involved as well, with the success that you have had in this campaign?

MICHAEL GANNON: Look, I don't count anything that's happened in the past two or three weeks as a success for the AMA or the medical profession. I think it's just...

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : You've had GPs out there running TV campaigns and saying that they were sending letters to patients warning them about the impact.

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, certainly, now's no time to be crowing on behalf of the AMA or the medical profession. I don't think that anyone particularly wants a hung Parliament. I think the uncertainty of the next two weeks is not necessarily good for the nation, and a difficult Lower House and Upper House is not necessarily good for our democracy. But look, let's just hope that this provides the opportunity to have genuine policy, which people across the political divide can embrace. I think that everyone needs to acknowledge that the health system is dear to Australians. Let's try and come up with policies that enjoy something like bipartisan support.

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : And you'd be keen to seek a meeting with whoever who is in charge of health policy whoever is the Government?

- MICHAEL GANNON: Oh, absolutely. And equally to invest time talking to the crossbench, talking to new members of Parliament in the Upper House or the Lower House about good health policy. We're all interested in it. We're all patients one day. We've all got loved ones who have an interface with the health system. It's appropriate that it's at the top of the political agenda. Let's come up with some good policies and let's have some mature conversations about how we sustainably fund it.
- GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : Dr Gannon, thanks very much.
- MICHAEL GANNON: It's a pleasure.
- GLEN BARTHOLOMEW : Michael Gannon, President of the Australian Medical Association.
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