



10.30 am, November 14, 2007
Media Conference to be held at -
Symbion Clinical Research Imaging Centre
Gate 1, Cnr Easy & Barker Streets
Randwick.

Taking part will be Dr Liz Kenny, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists and Dr Ron Shnier, President of the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association.

Medicare's Image might Disappear

A coalition of doctors, specialists and patient groups claim that a 10 year freeze on Medicare rebates for diagnostic imaging scans has left patients out of pocket and is jeopardizing investment in safer, high quality technologies.

“The days of people having affordable access to X-ray, CT, MRI and ultrasound are drawing to a close and everyone is likely to lose,” says Dr Liz Kenny, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR). Our greatest concern is centred on patients who may be unable to access X-Rays or scans due to out of pocket expenses. This will put an even greater burden on the radiology departments in public hospitals. For the last 10 years the government has essentially frozen Medicare rebates to patients for radiology services. Most of these rebates have actually gone down leaving significant out of pocket expense for patients. Rebates were not increased with the latest round of revised rebates just released.

“Health officials and ordinary citizens around the country are complaining about the pressure on emergency departments in public hospitals and the government’s ten year freeze on diagnostic imaging rebates to patients is making things worse,” claims Dr Liz Kenny, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR). “While rebates for diagnostic imaging have been frozen or even decreased, costs have gone up and the ability to bulk bill has all but disappeared. That means people who once had their scans and X-rays done in the community may not be able to afford them and will increasingly front up at our public hospitals wanting their scans or X-rays to be done there. The system simply will not be able to cope.

“We are not the only ones to voice our concern, Australia’s leading consumer organization, Choice, has also said that it is a major issue,” Dr Kenny added – see <http://www.choice.com.au/viewArticle.aspx?id=106045&catId=100570&tid=100011&p=1&title=Consumers+need+higher+radiology+rebate>

Dr Christine Walker of the Chronic Illness Alliance says, “The Chronic Illness Alliance recognises that patients with chronic illness face huge out of pocket costs and increasing payments for radiology services are another out of pocket expense that is placing them in greater financial distress.”

In addition, the AMA President, Dr Rosanna Capolingua recently said: "Today's rebates for CT scans, X-rays, MRIs and ultrasound have fallen well behind inflation, and are actually less than they were 10 years ago"

"It's an exercise in short sightedness," claims Dr Ron Shnier, President of the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association. "The whole country is saying we've got to do more in health care outside hospitals and the Government seems – at least in radiology – to be engineering the people with the greatest needs to line up in ever increasing queues in the State hospital system. Name me any other service in the nation that's had it's fees frozen for a decade.

"Let me just give you the figures," says Dr Shnier. "In 1998, the Medicare rebate on a CT Scan of the chest was \$259.30. In 2007 it's dropped to \$250.75 at the same time as costs have gone up. So patients are paying on average 23% more for all CT scans – and this is only over the last four years. An MRI brain scan Medicare rebate has dropped nearly 20% in dollar terms and nearly 60% in real terms and with some kinds of ultrasound the patient's out of pocket expenses have nearly doubled. Now you could argue that practices should be absorbing the increases. Well that's what's been happening for years but it's now unsustainable. When a new scanner costs several million dollars and the public expects – rightly – the safest, highest quality care, how are they supposed to find the money for that new investment?"

"We're calling on the major parties to commit to an increase in patient rebates of 10% to compensate for the 10 year freeze and make radiology services affordable. We are also calling for the restoration of patient rebates for MRI services which incur the highest patient out of pocket costs. The RANZCR and ADIA called for these increases in June yet the freeze continues. Patient care by their doctors and specialists is highly dependant on access by patients to affordable X-ray, CT, MRI and ultrasound services.," say Dr Kenny and Dr. Shnier. "Compared to other, more visible areas of medicine, patients are paying a high price for this freeze in rebates."

Background

For a thorough analysis of the fee situation in radiology click on:

<http://www.ranzcr.edu.au/documents/download.cfm/Medicare%20Benerfits%20Schedule%20Informatio%20Brochure.pdf?txtLibraryID=ranzcr&txtFileName=Medicare%20Benerfits%20Schedule%20Informatio%20Brochure%2Epdf>

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR)

"The College is the leading professional organisation in Australia and New Zealand for the promotion of the science and practice of the medical specialties of Radiology and Medical Imaging (Diagnostic and Interventional) and Radiation Oncology," explains Dr Liz Kenny, who is President of the College. "Radiology is the field of medicine in which a range of imaging technologies and procedures are used to diagnose and treat patients. Radiologists deliver a medical consultative service to other doctors by providing imaging and/or interventional services for patients who are referred to them by general practitioners (GPs) and other medical specialists. Radiation Oncologists are medical specialists who use radiation to treat patients with cancer. Radiation treatment, also known as radiotherapy, may be used to treat other diseases as well."

Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA)

The Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) is a not for profit organisation that represents the interests of diagnostic imaging practices and radiologists engaged in the

private sector. Its membership comprises both practice groups and single independent practices that have a common interest in quality private practice.

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