

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONDAY 22ND JULY 2013

Medical imaging can end chronic pain – *if you can afford it*

The Federal Government is being urged to act decisively to give thousands of Australians suffering terrible, chronic pain better access to medical imaging such as X-rays and CT scans.

Dr Sue Ulreich, President of the **Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA)**, has used **National Pain Week 2013** to call on the Government to close the gap in fees that thousands of Australians face when seeking radiology services to help them manage pain.

“Many people who are living with daily, on-going pain just cannot afford the imaging their doctors need to be able to effectively diagnose and manage their pain,” Dr Ulreich said.

“And this isn’t just a few people. Pain is the third most common cause for people seeking medical imaging, behind arthritis and cancer.”

In the past six months, ADIA has received almost 1,000 letters from people experiencing chronic pain services voicing their concerns about the ever increasing costs of medical imaging.

The central problem is that Medicare rebates for medical imaging have not been indexed since 1998. Therefore, the gap patients have to pay has been steadily growing over the past 15 years and are now increasing at approximately 10% per annum.

“It is bizarre to think that acupuncture is indexed, IVF is indexed, podiatry is indexed but diagnostic imaging – which is absolutely central to health care – is not,” Dr Ulreich said.

“Patients have a right to get early and accurate diagnosis to treat and manage pain, regardless of where they live or their socioeconomic background. Our patients have told us in no uncertain terms that the out of pocket expenses are crippling. Every day we see patients suffering terrible pain that is only worsened by the financial stress.”

Many ADIA member practices bulk-bill and/or provide subsidised imaging for people in need, but unfortunately that’s not enough.

“The reality is that many imaging services cannot be bulk-billed under Medicare, and the cost of providing quality imaging services is much higher than the Medicare fee,” Dr Ulreich said.

“We want to work with the Commonwealth Government to develop a sustainable solution that will improve Medicare rebates for patients experiencing pain, and thereby ensure medical imaging can be an effective and economic tool to help any Australian manage their pain.”

Real People – Real Pain

“\$30 back for a \$110 X-ray required multiple times over the last few years is far too costly. The gap seems to get bigger every year.” – **Louise Travaille**, Teesdale, Vic.

“I am a carer for my mother and I also have health issues – I think it is vitally important that as much financial stress as possible is removed.” – **Gail Holzberger**, Chuwar, Qld.

“Without Medicare rebates I would not be able to have tests required to find out what is wrong with me – as I simply could not afford to pay for all the tests I need”. – **Judy Bartlett**, Gympie, Qld.

BACKGROUND

Medical imaging is widely used to assess patients who suffer from localised or systemic pain to diagnose, treat and monitor the underlying cause of pain. While we all experience pain, it is complex and its causes can be difficult to diagnose. For more information about pain and the challenges for patients experiencing pain, please visit www.painaustralia.org.au

Medical imaging has an important role to play in diagnosis, and interventional radiology can play an important therapeutic and palliative role in pain management for patients, such as those experiencing joint pain.

To find out more about the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) visit www.adia.asn.au.

MEDIA

To speak to President Dr Ulreich, please contact on (08) 9320 1201.