

SUBMISSION: GENERAL PRACTICE COMPLIANCE COSTS 2002

EXPRESS Mail August 31, 2002

Productivity Commission, Locked Bag 2, Collins St. East (Attention: Kate Pearson,  
Admin. (Melb. Office), Collins St., East Post Office, MELBOURNE Vic., 3003.

INTRODUCTION: This Submission surveyed two regional medical Centres (related in corporate structure and staffing) being COWES MEDICAL CENTRE Phillip Island, Victoria, 3922 and its related SAN REMO MEDICAL CLINIC, Marine Parade, San Remo, Victoria, 3122 The investigative survey covered April 2000 to March, 2002 this year. (Note: Letterhead carries on its left/h/side PIMG representing group's symbolic trademark PIMG i.e., PHILLIP ISLAND MEDICAL GROUP).

\* To support our Findings, we attach the 'official' printed Notices, in date order over four years to 2001-2) headed: IMPORTANT NOTICE TO ALL OUR PATIENTS: . Note these are in sequence as issued , jointly, by the PHILLIP ISLAND MEDICAL GROUP & COWES MEDICAL CENTRE AND SAN REMO MEDICAL CENTRE) HEADED "FEE STRUCTURE" etc.,. We wish to acknowledge the willing assistance of doctors and medical staff and patients, who participated in THE ONLOOKER's research. With the help of these dedicated doctors, admin staff and patients, we were able to obtain precise evidence of rapid-deterioration in the availability of previous Medicare provisions for Pensioners, Healthcare Card Holders and Part Pension Card Holders.

\* Measuring Compliance Costs: REGIONAL RURAL AREA EXPERIENCE: Significant introduction of quasi-corporate fees/timing per patients' ration per shift: We draw your attention to FEE STRUCTURE as set out by the PIMG (Phillip Island Medical Group) who operate the Cowes Medical Centre, Cowes (Phillip Island) and the San Remo Medical Clinic). We stress the ratio of patients-per doctor syndrome which occurs seasonally in these regional medical practices.

Note: From early-Spring into late-Summer, the influx of long-term family-holiday home 'residents' exceeds, for example, in San Remo, 80-thousand 'visitors'. (the term 'visitors' is used by local permanent residents to describe 'price increases' also e.g., visitors' prices). This latter comment is valid in relate to this Submission as it was the basis in NOVEMBER, 200 1, efor the following insertion (see NO. 1 Enclosure headed IMPORTANT NOTICE TO ALL OUR PATIENTS; Nov.1, '01. Quote: NO CONCESSIONAL RATES ARE AVAILABLE FOR FIRST VISIT... Quote: PLEASE NOTE; THIS PRACTICE IS NOT A BULK BILLING PRACTICE

(Further down same November 2001 screed for all patients at PIMG clinics) Quote: REPEAT PRESCRIPTIONS "A request for a prescription will be considered by your doctor. If it is appropriate for a script to be issued, WITHOUT BEING SEEN (our caps.Ed..) a fee of \$10 will be charged. Scripts for antibiotics, warfarin and authority scripts will not be issued outside a consultation We require at least 48 hrs notice to process a request for script.

Page 2 Submission General Practice Compliance Cost from THE ONLOOKER Our contribution, herein, highlights the increasing number of pensioners, health care holders and Part Pension Card Holders in Phillip Island and San Remo.

There is a growing antipathy towards the 'privately run' medical centres. 'We haven't got a bulk-billing doctor left, here...' says elderly "Rita". "You have to go to Wonthaggi if you want to bulk bill and even that's NOT certain for long,..." says another elderly woman whose husband has lung disease arising from working as a Miner.. The woman has a variety of ills and having worked from the age of 14 as a laundry hand, domestic servant, she suffers from v. painful leg and feet conditions.

"They don't want to know you...if you're old and a pensioner..." PHARMACEUTICAL COSTS:

In January, this year, 2002, THE ONLOOKER was a participant in a debate with the then-only chemist in San Remo. Mr Carruthers , a v. wealthy chemist and pharmacist and seller of all types of pharmaceuticals/ etc., also stocks large supplies of hats, sunglasses, even pottery as well as expensive perfumes et seq., What Mr Carruthers refused to supply to THE ONLOOKER was her physician prescribed eye drops which were GENERIC. 'We don't stock that rubbish," snorted Mr Carruthers, whose territory extends beyond the chemist shop building (which is v. large for San Remo) and embraces the site of the SAN REMO MEDICAL CLINIC.

THE ONLOOKER challenged Mr Carruthers, the Pharmacist, as to what product he did stock as normal eye drops. He nominated an expensive brand. We bought it and then advised the chemist, that we would be referring the matter to the State Dept., of Consumer Affairs. "You do what you like," Mr Carruthers said. However, he retired to our surprise to be the subject of a lengthy local article about his plans for a career in development projects). By December, 2001, were two 'new' chemists, leasing the large pharmacy in San Remo, These two pharmacists, namely, Ms Lazzarotto and her equally pleasant and qualified partner, , Nk G. Orlanzoglou, responded favourably when asked to supply the writer with 'generic' eye drops. 'We have no trouble with generics ... we will stock them with pleasure..." srrdled Ms Laaarotto. And many pensioners and others were able to access generic medicines.. As we had pointed out to her predecessor, Mr Carruthers, the Lessor of his pharmacy now, the same firm which makes the 'branded' more expensive eye drops also produced the 'generic' i.e., being the same product.

We have given in this Submission our experiences/findings in one small Victorian rural sector which as we stress is 'flooded' with up to 100,000 holiday vacationers (av. stay three weeks over Christmas /New Year) in Phillip Island, alone. While in San Remo and small rural towns nearby, as many as 70,000 stay as families in leased flats, homes, caravans etc., etc., average of two to three weeks. The effect on the areas e.g., two medical clinics is highly profitable. We have NOT tabulated that herein. Page 3

#### SUMMARY OF SUBMISSION "GENERAL PRACTICE COMPLIANCE COSTS IN SAN REMO AND ADJACENT COWES...PHILLIP ISLAND MED.GROUP

1 We are disturbed on finding evidence of the consistent erosion of Medicare rebates e.g., Regionally, increased high costs to Healthcard Holders of Prescriptions (especially the present charge for pensioners of \$10 for a repeat prescription WITHOUT CONSULTATION IN RURAL REGIONAL TOWNS such as San Remo and Cowes, Phillip Island > VYTE have no evidence nor have we been charged by privately-run medical clinics for REPEAT SCRIPTS without Consultation. in Melbourne's suburbs such as Toorak, Kew, South Yarra .. (We are unable to discover if this is 'uniform' practice in Melbourne's suburbia at this stage).

We have evidence of an increase in compliance with GP costs of paying \$5 for a fee up front for a consultation which was hitherto free. "Due to our higher insurance levy," said one Eastern Suburb GP. This might be the 'thin edge of the wedge' he and the patient consider.

In support of our comments we attach all relevant documents . We have NOT revealed any material of a confidential or 'hurtful' nature ( Ed., "Law Affecting Journalism" Melb., Uni., 1949) We ask for a restriction on one so-marked section.. The following section is for publication Additional background to our main interviewee in San Remo,

The writer was a 'witness' to a spontaneous and uncommon public 'gesture of appreciation' which was held in San Remo, early-Feb., . Dr David Awburn, who had decided to accept a consultancy practice, in Frankston, Victoria, was given a patients and staff funded-public farewell. Patients of Dr Awburn's were determined to place on record their appreciation of his quiet, dedicated professionalism.

In-SAN REMO, Dr Awburn , as was widely known, examined/treated/prescribed his individual Patients as he believed warranted by his patient's medical condition. He was known to be thorough, prompt and to have qualifications , equal to/ or "above his in uTtediate peer group. A quiet man, popular with adult and child patients These comments are consistent with our Submission's investigation as the San Remo/Phillip Island Medical group began to assume a corporate practice image.

Topically, Four Corners (ABC-TV) program on Corporate Medical Practice(s) last year, provided hard evidence of acceptance by regional medical practices.

NO BULK BILLING and adoption of the private sector credo, "more patients per hour more profits-per partner/medico..". The Phillip Island Medical Group (operators of Cowes Medical Centre and San Rerno Medical Clinic denied corporate-status:

No, we are NOT a corporate medical practice group, with each doctor having shares in the revenue accrued from patients," was the rebuke THE ONLOOKER received. I asked the Clinic's spokesperson "Why further 'scripts (i.e. repeat scripts) were now priced at \$10 WITHOUT CONSULTATION. why patients' repeat '(as in Cmore)' for an explanation of lesser pensioner rebates, and a \$10 charge for "REPEAT" - PRESCRIPTION WITHOUT A CONSULTATION..." & only with 48 hrs. notice. No repeat scripts> One Doctor's Dilemma.. 15-minutes for each patient ... otherwise, double the fee as scheduled. Less time for each patient, More profitable schedule. The more profitable 'regime' at the San Remo Medical Clinic was not unwelcome" to some of Dr A's 'medico colleagues'. The schedule (new) time for examining/ treatment of each patient'. was 15 minutes per patient. This regime meant , ideally, that each doctor examined NO fewer patients than four patients per hour.. That's 32 patients, ideally, in an 8-hrs shift or better still, double the patient's fee after 15 minutes.

When this writer was attending both practices and also researching their methods etc.,) Dr A. had NOT accelerated his ratio of patients per hour per single shift He disliked adjusting his patients' examination rate per shift to suit an increasing Corporate-type' practice Dr David Awburn who , with his wife and young family, was spontaneously given a spontaneously-organised public-supported "Farewell of Thanks" for his several years of dedicated medical and social service to patients and their families in San Rerno, particularly and surrounding Phillip Island districts . Dr Awburn was a young, highly-qualified medical practitioner, who was an upholder of the full benefits (as expressed in the Aust. Government's Medicare Charter). He once expressed 'ON RECORD' to this Editor (The Onlooker INL) the following comment: " I find it difficult to listen to, examine, treat and prescribe for all of my patients within a limited time such as 15 minutes..." he said.

SUMMARY: The erosion of Medi care provisions are increasing. Evidence abounds and concessions are disappearing while increased fees proliferate.

NOTE: We congratulate the Productivity Commission for its opportune research study.'

Submission ends. BY EXPRESS DELIVERY PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION