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AMA and Hockey play 'wedge politics' with co-payment plans

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) together with the Doctors Reform Society (DRS) have called on the Abbott Government to abandon its \$7 GP co-payment plan and reject the Australian Medical Association's (AMA) alternative co-payment proposal.

Both the NSWNMA and the DRS publicly criticised the AMA for its attempt to play politics with the universality of Medicare and dupe the Australian public into believing its \$6.15 co-payment was a legitimate alternative.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, said it was incomprehensible for the AMA to jump in as a lead negotiator on such an important public policy decision, then deliver a self-serving proposal for serious consideration by the federal Parliament when it resumes next week.

"The AMA has failed to make any convincing arguments to support the notion that a co-payment, of any size or structure, is the best approach for the government to inflict on hard working Australians as a means of improving efficiencies or assisting its so-called 'budget emergency'," Mr Holmes said.

"The alternative proposal offered by the AMA would still have an adverse impact on many people in our communities, lead to a worsening of chronic illness, more hospital admissions, the dismantling of our universal healthcare system and on the path to an Americanised user-pays model.

"Let's not forget that Australia has one of the best health systems in the world and other countries look to our health system to incorporate current models and policies."

National President of the DRS, Dr Con Costa, said equitable access to quality healthcare, regardless of income or postcode, was a right in Australian society and not a privilege that could be manipulated for vested interests.

"There is no evidence to support either the AMA or the Federal Government's claim that any form of co-payment within our health system would send an appropriate 'price signal' to control costs or improve health outcomes – there are no statistics available from Medicare to prove this," Dr Costa said.

"Rather than offering a proposal focused on true reform, or a strengthening of primary healthcare to help keep people out of hospitals, the AMA has attempted to wedge the community within the Abbott Government's goal posts.

"This would only create a two-tier health system, where doctors have the ability to charge some patients and not others – it is not a viable option for the Labor, Greens, Palmer United or other independent Senators to seriously consider – they must reject it.

“The alternative co-payment proposed by the AMA is seriously flawed and justifies why the government must scrap the notion all together.”

The NSWNMA and the DSR both agreed that any attempt by the Abbott Government to introduce GP co-payments or others, would pave the way for private health insurance companies to encroach further into general practice – a move currently being trialled by Medibank Private in Queensland.

The NSWNMA and the DSR opposed any moves by the government to shift Australia’s health system towards a two-tier Americanised style of healthcare.

Both groups vowed to continue to campaign against the impost of any GP co-payments and the ideological attack on the universality of Medicare.

The NSW Nurses and Midwives’ Association represents more than 59,000 nursing and midwifery professionals throughout New South Wales.

The Doctors Reform Society was established in 1973 to support a publicly-funded universal health insurance system.

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