

Australian Health Insurance Association Ltd

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MEDIA RELEASE

26 March 2008

Private Health Insurance Backs National Medical Registration

The Australian Private Health Insurance Industry's peak body has welcomed moves to give consumers access to information about the performance of medical practitioners and hospitals.

The Australian Health Insurance Association's CEO, Hon. Dr Michael Armitage said the AHIA also supported a system of National Registration because of the contribution it would make to improving patient safety. "If this means a revamp of the present Medical Board Registration processes in the interests of better patient care, so be it".

"Although Australia's Health care system performs very well, there is much that can be done to improve quality and safety. The AHIA has been working with health consumer groups to campaign for hospitals, both private and public, to publish infection and readmission rates, and for the publication of success rates of medical procedures.

"Australian consumers should have access to information about the performance of both doctors and hospitals. I know that people who are connected with the health industry or have a medical background can find out what they want to know prior to undergoing a medical procedure. Every Australian should have easy access to that same information.

"Hospitalisation is a hazardous event, because of its very nature. Whilst this is acknowledged, many of the procedures have their own risks, with drug errors followed by hospital infections being the biggest problem associated with hospitalisation. Hospital infections occur in at least 10% of acute admissions and between 50-80% are preventable.

"Every year in Australia there are about 7000 cases of Staphylococcus aureus (Golden Staph). Of these about two thirds are health care related and about 2000 of these will have high level antibiotic resistance (i.e MRSA). About 400 Australians die from MRSA each year.

"Equally, the records of the procedures undertaken by medical practitioners should be publicly available. In the United States a number of doctors associations, private health funds and hospitals have developed a system whereby providers do not have to pay for what they call "never events", or events which should never happen. For example, no one should ever be transfused with blood which is not completely matching and no one should ever have a knee or a hip prosthesis inserted on the wrong side of the body.

"The AHIA is keen to discuss similar outcomes in patients' interests with relevant bodies in Australia. The AHIA fully supports the comments made on Tuesday morning by the Minister for Health Nicola Roxon in relation to improving quality and safety: *We want to make sure that quality and patient safety is given top priority and we believe that a national registration system can help do that. (Roxon 25/3/08)*"

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