



### **AACP Annual General Meeting – Thursday 29 November 2007**

Vice-President Louis McGuigan tendered his resignation but remains a committed AACP member. Dr McGuigan contributed vital expertise and persuasive arguments during our recent campaign for the introduction of the new MBS item numbers 132 & 133. He was appropriately acknowledged and farewelled.

### **Welcome to our new Vice-President, Dr William Heddle**

Dr Heddle has been a valued Council member and brings a wealth of experience to the AACP. As well as being in private practice he is a Senior Consultant Cardiologist at Flinders Medical Centre and Senior Lecturer in Medicine at Flinders University. Dr Heddle was AMA (SA) President 2003–2005. He is Physician Craft Group representative on AMA Federal Council and a member of the RACP SA State Committee.

### **Introduction of MBS Items 132 & 133**

This has prompted numerous enquiries, mainly re the Medicare Australia/PSR interpretation of 'at least 45 minutes'. Most have been resolved by suggesting the physicians carefully analyse the information in the MBS Schedule descriptors and explanatory notes. Unfortunately the issue of flexibility with non-face-to-face time is not as flexible as some may be attempting to interpret. 'The time is what the time is'.

### **Meeting with DoHA Friday November 30, 2007**

Our scheduled quarterly meeting with the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) was held in Canberra on Friday November 30. This was the first meeting with Mr Tony Kingdon (First Assistant Secretary, Medical Benefits Division), and the first since the Federal election.

One of the most important items discussed was **the need for an additional extended Review/Subsequent consultation item for CPPs (proposed MBS Item '118') after an Initial Consultation MBS Item 110.**

There is significant background information to be assessed before this Item can progress – eg costing projections, and need for additional MBS funding. The precedent with MBS Item 133 is now more evident, with multiple reports of patients increasingly 'out-of-pocket' for 'gap' expenses for regular review consultations.

Other matters covered at this meeting included:

- **The implementation of MBS Items 132 & 133**, and difficulties encountered due to variations in interpretation between Medicare offices.
- **Agreement on the use of MBS Items for Autism Spectrum Disorder.** There may be future discussions in relation to specific items for paediatricians.
- **Access by consultant physicians and paediatricians to allied health referrals.** The current MBS items are only accessible for patients referred by general practitioners. This seems anomalous!
- **The new Geriatrician MBS Items 141-147** – announced as being for 'health checks for all Australians over 65 years old' (~2.6 million people), yet only accessible by 'certified consultant geriatricians and specialist geriatricians'. This has prompted significant discussion and concern due to the scarcity of available geriatricians, especially in rural Australia (~300 EFT geriatricians, 200 practising Fellows and ~75 registered for private practice outside hospital settings). The generalisability of the geriatrician-driven initiative to other CPs, especially for those practising in areas where there is no ready access to geriatricians, is being pursued. Discussions are progressing.
- The linkage between GP **EPC items** and physician reviews, and the link to case conferences.
- The new **Rural Registrar Training Scheme** – progressing well, and enthusiastically supported by DoHA.
- The AACP's recent discussions with the Australasian Chapter of Palliative Medicine re **home visits** and **non-face-to-face consultations** with family and relatives.

### **AACP Membership and 2008 Agenda**

The AACP is the key organisation that assists all Australian consultant physicians and paediatricians in maintaining their income. However, only 10% of were financial members in 2007. We are actively pursuing new members and encourage all existing members to spread the word to their colleagues – thanks to those who are already doing so. There are many issues to be actively pursued in 2008. The new Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Nicola Roxon, MP, will need to be further apprised of the role of CPPs in the Australian health system.

Best wishes for the holiday season, and a happy and healthy New Year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leslie E Bolitho'.

Dr Leslie E Bolitho  
President, AACP