



Association of Independent Retirees

AIR ACTIVE

Keeping Independent People Informed

MEETING WITH AUSTRALIAN HEALTH INSURANCE ASSOCIATION

The Australian Health Insurance Association Ltd (AHIA) provides a quarterly discussion forum where consumer groups from around Australia are invited to participate in topics related to the Private Health Insurance industry. A.I.R. has been a participant in these discussion forums in the past, and I attended the most recent one on behalf of A.I.R. on 20 September 2007.

At the previous meeting on 21 June 2007, the Hon Dr M Armitage, the Chief Executive Officer of AHIA, led the discussion outlining the common 'myths' that surround private health insurance, the profit, the impact of the rebate, types of surgery, and so on.

At the recent meeting last month, the topics were current, and are being shared here with A.I.R. members, for two reasons: to promote interest and discussion at monthly meetings, and to create wider awareness and support for the issues being raised by AHIA.

In no particular order, other than interest and immediate application, are some of these issues that were discussed:

1. Do we need a Cardiac Register?

A National Joint Register was developed by orthopaedic surgeons, with the support of AHIA, for use as a post-marketing tool for evaluating prosthetic joints. The idea behind this register is that information about joints and manufacturers is entered, and patients can be followed long-term. The National Joint Register costs about \$1.5million to operate annually.

The National Heart Foundation and AHIA are in favour of developing a Cardiac Register, to evaluate the many medical devices which are used, such as pacemakers, stents, etc. Again the intention is to have a post-marketing tool, to monitor patient outcomes and other issues such as when to change marketing licences.

2. Medicare Levy Surcharge Calculator:

AHIA has developed a very useful website for calculating online the Medicare Levy Surcharge, requiring just the family type, the gross income, Y or N for private health insurance. There are links, also, to the ATO and Medicare on this website, which is: privatehealth.com.au/surcharge.php

3. Informed Financial Consent:

A very relevant topic, judging by the stories and impressions of the consumer representatives at the meeting. Is the financial gap, between the Medicare rebate and the insurer's coverage, understood by patients; is the patient informed, can the patient seek other 'quotes' for the same procedure. Who should educate the patient?

4. Hospital Ratings:

Is reporting of say, incidents, rates of infection, etc a public education service? Could reporting be influenced by penalties, sanctions or incentives? The meeting discussed the difficulty with overall hospital ratings, and undue influence from the most traumatic or risky departments in the hospital, or even the singular work of a surgeon. One example, citing US research, was that following publication of the mortality rate in children aged 12 months, over a 10 year period, there was a subsequent reduction in deaths which was deemed to be compelling evidence that hospital rates can be influenced.

5. Should information about doctor's average fees and out-of-pocket costs for services be available to patients?

This question was asked to ascertain whether more information would assist patients in comparing their costs against an average. It was felt that an average for a health area/region would be more appropriate. The Informed Financial Cost was seen as more effective to deliver relevant information for patients.

6. Annual Conference, at Park Hyatt, Melbourne, 8-10 October 2007

AHIA will be conducting its annual conference, under the theme *Private Health Care 2017* in Melbourne. The conference will explore ways in which private health care will be provided a decade from now in an "over the horizon" scan of the challenges ahead. It will be opened by the Minister for Health and Ageing, Hon Tony Abbott MP, and feature American and Australian speakers including the Shadow Minister for Health, Nicola Roxon and Norman Swan. The wide-ranging program topics include obesity, clinical influences on the private health insurance industry, economic outlook and implications for the health industry.

**Reported by Theresa Kot
Deputy National President**

**OLDER PEOPLE AND THE LAW –
Inquiry report released**

The House of Representatives Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee has released its report on older people and the law, making a total of 48 recommendations with a particular focus on fraud, financial abuse, substitute decision making and family agreements.

There was a considerable amount of interest from A.I.R. members in the inquiry.

Key recommendations included: national industry-wide protocols for banks and financial institutions to report alleged financial abuse; uniform legislation on powers of attorney nationally, including a register of enduring powers of attorney; nationally consistent

legislation on guardianship arrangements; a rebate scheme for legal fees for older Australians; and a review of retirement village contract arrangements.

The full report is available at:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/laca/olderpeople/report.htm>

From the Webmaster

A number of emails have been received from members enquiring about access to the 'Members Only' section of the website. The details required to access this section of the website are as follows:

Userid: airbranch (type it in as shown - one word, not an abbreviation of your branch name or your membership number).

Password: 290405 (all numerics)

Once you have entered the 'Members Only' section you will see the details of all documents that have been placed on the website, however there is a drop down menu located at the top of the page which contains details of the various categories that the documents have been placed under. Using this menu will save you having to scroll through all the documents to find the document for which you may be looking.

The A.I.R. submission to *Political Parties and Candidates in Australia, Federal Election 2007* has been placed in the General Section of the website under 'Media and Events' and can be copied from there and placed on your computer should you need to do so.

To assist Branches which require additional copies the Branch Delegate and Proxy Registration Forms, these have been placed in the 'Members Only' section of the website under the category "2007 AGM Matters".

The Board is currently looking at making the website much more informative so keep looking for the improvements which should be in place by the end of this calendar year.

Bob Smith

October 2007