



Rural Doctors Association
of Queensland
“Caring for the Country”

Media Release 19th April 2011

Country doctors seeking answers over hospital Medicare billing plans

President of the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland, Dr Dan Halliday today called for openness and due process as Queensland Health seeks to establish bulk-billed services in some country hospitals.

“There are towns where Queensland Health seems keen to set up bulk-billing clinics in their hospitals,” Dr Halliday said. “Some of our members feel threatened by that and we want some answers as to what’s going on.”

As a general rule, public hospitals can only bulk-bill Medicare for limited services, typically provided by specialists on referral from a patient’s own GP. Non-referred patients can be bulk-billed in some settings where all local GPs have agreed; or where a private practice clinic is co-located at a hospital.

“These regulations that allow hospitals to bill Medicare have particular rules and we want to be sure they are being followed properly,” Dr Halliday said. “Our members don’t want to feel that Government hospitals are competing with their businesses, even if that’s not the intention.”

“We all know that it’s hard to get appointments in many country towns,” Dr Halliday said. “It will get harder if we drive the local doctors out of business and that could happen if bulk-billing clinics at hospitals have their overheads met by the State.”

“On the other hand, we all want our patients to get the care they need, when they need it,” he added. “We know that Medicare spending is too low in rural Australia and country residents are entitled to equitable access to health care.”

A teleconference on Tuesday evening will explore some of these issues as they relate to doctors in Proserpine, concerned about the recent opening of a bulk-billed clinic in the hospital there.

“Private and public sectors can work together for the benefit of all,” Dr Halliday said. “we need to be sure that if Medicare money is flowing into a town, that it brings new services with it and just doesn’t prop up a neglected, underfunded or struggling State system.”

For comment or further information contact:

Dr Dan Halliday on 0418 773 228

Rural Doctors Association of Queensland: Caring for the Country

Ph: (07) 3221 4444

Fax: (07) 3221 3748

Email: rdaq@rdaq.com.au

GPO Box 2523, Brisbane, Qld 4001
Level 1, 410 Queen Street, Brisbane, Qld 4000

For addition to, or removal from, this RDAQ Media distribution list contact mc.rice@bigpond.com