

04 March 2019

## **Name-and-shame website plan simply shames Government inaction**

A proposal by the Federal Government to establish a website listing specialist doctors' fees and their out-of-pocket charges will do nothing to reduce costs and be little more than a dangerous distraction for patients seeking treatment.

The website reportedly will specifically target gynaecology, obstetrics and cancer services.

The President of the National Association of Specialist Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (NASOG), Dr Stephen Lane, said reports on how the website would be structured showed it was little more than an election gimmick with no real focus on making specialist healthcare more affordable.

"It has to be understood that specialist obstetricians and gynaecologists also are concerned about out-of-pocket expenses and we understand fully the pressure they put on members of the public accessing private care," Dr Lane said.

"This is particularly evident in underfunded areas like obstetrics and gynaecology where the Medicare Benefits Schedule has never valued these services.

"But rather than embarking on a doctor-bashing exercise, the Government should accept that the answers to reducing out-of-pocket expenses lie within easy reach and that is by simply having an industry fee standard that is realistic and workable. The reality is that the Government has been shamed by its failure to act on the obvious and easy solution."

Dr Lane said the public, the Government and insurers would benefit from such a measure which would need to be based on median fees charged and must be indexed to Consumer Price Index or another measure of cost escalation which is appropriate.

"The development of such a standard list of fees, in consultation with specialist doctors such as obstetricians and gynaecologists, could all but eliminate out-of-pockets and give agencies an avenue to call out providers to explain why they charge more than industry accepted fees," Dr Lane said.

"This would provide real solutions rather than headline grabbing name-and-shame populist measures as currently proposed by the Government. Specialist obstetricians and gynaecologists want solutions to make care more affordable and we are confident our proposal provides a real and achievable answer."

Dr Lane said some doctors and specialists charged above the Medicare fee because the Government's schedule of fees had not kept pace with the CPI.

"What this means is that specialties like obstetrics and gynaecology that have experienced high cost increases are now only partially funded by the Government. Unfortunately, it is the consumer who is feeling the impact of this," he said

Dr Lane said the cost of running a quality private practice included high levels of nursing and administrative support, expensive state-of-the-art equipment and high medical indemnity costs.

"A realistic standard would need to incorporate the 'hidden' costs of running a practice and establish a schedule that ensures specialist obstetricians and gynaecologists can continue to offer services to women who choose this model of care."

Dr Lane said the Government also had to recognise that obstetricians in private practice co-ordinated a multidisciplinary team including midwives, physicians, anaesthetists, paediatricians and other medical colleagues as required.

"Australia is recognised as one of the safest countries in the world to have a baby, and this reflects the world class education our specialist obstetricians and gynaecologists undertake, with many completing more than 12 years of study and training. NASOG believes that the care provided by specialist obstetricians and gynaecologists is worth every cent to the patients who enjoy improved health outcomes as a result of our professional care. Let's get a system in place in which more women will have access to these services."

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**For all Media Inquiries**, please contact NASOG CEO Caroline Khalil on 0400 101 109.

About NASOG: The National Association of Specialist Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (NASOG) is a not-for-profit professional association representing specialist obstetricians and gynaecologists, the leading providers of specialist women's health services.

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**NASOG is Australia's professional body for Obstetricians and Gynaecologists**

