



**RURAL DOCTORS
ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA**

Caring for the Country

Professor Chris Baggoley
Chief Executive
Australian Commission on Safety &
Quality in Healthcare
GPO Box 5480
Sydney 2001 NSW

Dear Professor Baggoley,

RE: Call for written submissions on a draft National Patient Charter of Rights

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the development of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare National Patient Charter of Rights.

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) welcomes the development of a National Patient Charter of Rights. The RDAA was formed in 1991 and is the national body representing the interests of rural medical practitioners right around Australia. Our vision is for excellent medical care for rural and remote communities. RDAA is committed to building and maintaining a workforce of highly skilled and motivated rural medical practitioners.

RDAA strongly support the inclusion of ***Principle 1. Access: Equity of access to public health care***, particularly the point that ***a patient is entitled to equitable access to public health services regardless of place of residence***.

Approximately 34% of Australians live outside of major cities in regional, rural and remote areas. Australians who live in rural and remote areas have the same right to quality health services as their counterparts who live in metropolitan centres. However, Australians who live in country areas access health services at much lower rates than metropolitan residents and have significantly worse health outcomes. Rural Australians should be able to expect a reasonable level of health services, including access to a rural generalist doctor, accident and emergency services, maternity services, and essential medical and surgical facilities at their local hospitals¹. We believe it is therefore vital for the National Patient Charter of Rights to recognize patients' entitlement to equitable access to public health services regardless of place of residence.

RDAA endorse ***Principle 3. Safety: Promoting safe and competent care*** and the corresponding point that ***a patient is entitled to an environment where systems and staff are working to ensure patient safety***.

RDAA believe that all Australians should be able to access health care delivered in a safe environment. RDAA also recognize that many Australians, particularly those living

¹ Rural Doctors Association of Australia (2007) Federal Election Position Statement 2007

in rural and remote areas do not have equitable access to health services. Rural Australians are entitled to safe and competent care and this should not be compromised. RDAA believe patients who have to travel to access health services should be supported via adequate patient assistance transport schemes. Supporting patients to access services provides an opportunity to address some of the inequity suffered by Australians who live in rural and remote areas.

Furthermore, acute services need to be well supported by coordinated ambulance and retrieval services. Rural emergency departments should also have access to immediate advice from emergency and trauma centres in major hospitals when rural doctors are treating complex life threatening cases.

RDAA appreciate that many health professionals, including overseas trained doctors, work in isolation in rural and remote areas of Australia. These individuals require an adequate system of support to assist them in providing safe and competent care to their patients.

RDAA also welcome the inclusion of ***Principle 5. Information: being informed about services, treatment and care***, noting the point that ***a patient is entitled to information that satisfies them about any proposed treatment and medication, including the possible risks and alternatives.***

Rural Australians are significantly disadvantaged through a lack of access to reliable information about health services, treatment and care. RDAA acknowledge that rural Australians are not able to access the full gambit of health services available to their metropolitan counterparts and often have to travel for advanced diagnosis and treatment. It is therefore imperative that patients in rural Australia are provided with comprehensive and reliable information with regard to proposed treatment and medication, including the possible risks and alternatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute feedback on the development of a National Charter for Patient Rights.

The RDAA would be pleased to provide further information to the Commission in relation to any of the issues covered above, or being considered by the Commission. I can be contacted on (02) 6273 9303 or via email ceo@rdaa.com.au.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Sant
Chief Executive Officer
Rural Doctors Association of Australia

25 February 2008