

Ms Monica Bourke
Senior Project Officer
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

BY EMAIL: Monica.Bourke@accc.gov.au

9 December 2008

Dear Ms Bourke,

As a long standing anaesthetist working at St. Vincents Private Hospital (since 1971), I wish to correct some errors in the submission made by Dr Roger Levy.

Dr. Levy states “the anaesthetic department is run by a single medical practice group”. The St. Vincents Private Anaesthetic Department (SVPAD) is not a medical practice group – it is an Anaesthetic Department, having nothing to do with the financial side of individual members practices. It was set up to better organise the anaesthetic requirements of a very busy acute care hospital, which handles all types of surgery except for organ transplantation. I will quote from the SVPAD Policy and Procedures Manual:

1.2 OBJECTIVES

- . The Anaesthetic Department is established to provide the following services:-*
- a) To administer anaesthesia and analgesia to patients in a manner which incorporates the highest standards of clinical and ethical practice. All care that is given is consistent with the philosophy of the Sisters of Charity Health Service.*
 - b) To meet all the needs for anaesthetic services in St. Vincents Private Hospital and St. Vincents Private Hospital Day Surgery Unit.*
 - c) To provide a consultative service in fields related to anaesthesia such as blood transfusions, intravenous infusions, pain relief and resuscitation.*
 - d) To participate in inservice training programmes for nursing staff.*
 - e) To organise and administer the anaesthetic services in St. Vincents Private Hospital and Clinic.*
 - f) To achieve a high standard of anaesthetic care by following the guidelines for anaesthetic practice laid down in the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) Policy Documents.*
 - g) To facilitate and encourage its members to participate in Continuing Medical Education, Peer review and Quality Assurance activities*

Dr. Levy notes that the “anaesthetic department is in a position to control patient’s anaesthetic fees at the hospital without competition from other anaesthetists.” This is not so.

The SVPAD Policy & Procedures manual states:

“2.6 ANAESTHETIC FEES

- Each anaesthetist is responsible for his/her own billing arrangements.*

- *The members of the Department regard the range of anaesthetic fees recommended by the Australian Medical Association to be fair and reasonable private anaesthetic fees, however each anaesthetist must make an independent determination as to what his or her services are worth and is not bound to follow the AMA Schedule.*
- *Whenever possible, patients should be made aware in advance of fees and expected "Gap" payments that can be anticipated."*

SVPAD is quite different from the "anaesthetic departments" in other private hospitals. It employs its own secretary who is responsible for organising holiday relief, circulating rosters, etc. The department leases part of a St. Vincent's Clinic suite so that anaesthetists have consulting rooms in which to assess patients preadmission. This has become more important with the high rate of same day admissions for even major surgery. The secretary's salary and other departmental costs are paid by the members of the department by means of a levy.

Allocation of anaesthetists to operating lists is organised by SVPAD in accordance with well established written guidelines and in an open, fair and equitable manner. The ability of the anaesthetist to perform the particular type of surgery is taken into consideration, as is the surgeon's preference for a particular anaesthetist.

As far as patients are concerned, if one wishes for a particular anaesthetist to look after him/her, then every measure is taken to arrange this if possible. The Policy & Procedures Manual states:

3.1 *Scheduled Operating Sessions*

- If a patient expresses a desire to have a particular accredited anaesthetist provide anaesthetic services then every avenue will be explored to satisfy that wish.*

It would appear that Dr. Levy has no idea how the St. Vincent's Private Anaesthetic Department works.

Yours sincerely,

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