



Government of South Australia

Department of Health

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Ms Isabelle Arnaud
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Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
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Dear Ms Arnaud

RE: APPLICATION FOR AUTHORISATION A91078 LODGED BY THE RURAL DOCTORS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA LIMITED – INTERESTED PARTY CONSULTATION

Thank you for your letter of 17 December 2007, seeking the Department of Health's views regarding the application for authorisation by the Rural Doctors Association of Australia to collectively negotiate the terms of contracts for visiting medical officers in rural areas with state/territory health departments.

The South Australian Department of Health is concerned that the granting of this authorisation will undermine the current collaborative arrangements that are in place in Country Health SA (CHSA).

The South Australian Department of Health through CHSA operates as a single agency covering all health units in country SA. CHSA has developed collaborative consistent remuneration arrangements with the private medical workforce who serve these health units.

These arrangements reflect many years of collaborative health service delivery in country SA and recognise the unique service requirements within country health services. It combines agreed recruitment incentives with the medical workforce and related medical agencies, which encompasses delineated functions, best practice, and country health sector linkages.

Additionally you sought the department's views on the issues of:

- The current arrangements or process for the negotiation of contracts for visiting medical officers
- The role of general practitioners in providing visiting medical officer services in rural areas.

The current arrangements or process for the negotiation of contracts for visiting medical officers

The South Australian Department of Health through CHSA has recently moved from an "industrial" model to a more broadly collaborative model in negotiating the South Australian Rural Medical Engagement Schedule (SARMES) and the South Australian Medical Schedule of Fees (SAMSOF).

This process, which is coordinated through our CHSA Rural Doctors Liaison Forum, involves the following organisations:

- Australian Medical Association (AMA)
- Rural Doctors Association of South Australia
- Rural Doctors Workforce Association
- Royal College of General Practitioners and
- Australian College of Rural & Remote Medicine.

This new system has resulted in better outcomes for health care service delivery and for rural doctors than the previous system and, while the current process involves applying a common fee schedule universally across country SA, it also allows sufficient flexibility in relation to other benefits to enable CHSA to remain competitive in the market for medical practitioners.

Through the process outlined above, a schedule of fees and supporting documentation has been produced. These are available at:

SARMES - <http://www.countryhealthsa.sa.gov.au/Portals/0/SARMES2007.pdf>

SAMSOF - <http://www.countryhealthsa.sa.gov.au/Portals/0/SAMSOF%202008.pdf>

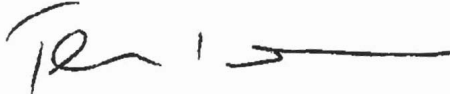
The role of general practitioners in providing visiting medical officer services in rural areas.

CHSA employs very few medical practitioners in its hospitals, and in all but a few large hospitals all medical treatment (whether by local general practitioners or local or visiting specialists) is provided on a fee for service basis using SARMES and SAMSOF. Those few doctors who are employees are employed under the South Australian Salaried Medical Officers Award and are represented by the South Australian Salaried Medical Officers Association (SASMOA).

As in other jurisdictions, general practitioners have their duties delineated through a Clinical Privileging process (which in South Australia's case is a central process) and their admitting privileges determined by the local hospital. General practitioners are responsible for admitting and discharging inpatients and for their care while admitted and are usually available on call (through a roster) to care for inpatients and emergencies as required. Some general practitioners also undertake surgery, obstetrics and/or anaesthetics.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on this application.

Yours sincerely



DR TONY SHERBON
Chief Executive

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