



**CALMS**  
Canberra After hours  
Locum Medical Service

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Australian Competition and Consumer Commission  
GPO Box 520  
Melbourne Vic 3001  
Attn Marie Dallins  
Director  
Adjudication Branch  
4<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

Dear Marie

Further to your request dated 29<sup>th</sup> September please following answers to your queries.  
Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further clarification.

1. CALMS has a regular locum pool of eleven GP's who work shifts in the clinics and on the roads. I believe there are over three hundred registered GP's in the ACT though I am unsure as to the full time equivalency that those GP's represent. In any given month it is likely that all the locums will be part of our roster. During a typical month CALMS will require to fill a minimum of 64 shifts. However in addition to the locum roster CALMS relies on the practice principals of our member practices to be on a back up roster where should any of the locums fall ill or be unable to make their shift the principal will work instead. Approximately 80% of ACT General Practices are members of CALMS.
2. The relevant particulars of the contract in respect of the not to exceed fee schedule are simply that the ACT Government recognized the importance of having a not to exceed fee schedule on an ongoing basis in that it ensured prospective patients of the service were better informed as to the maximum out of pocket expenses they would entail by utilizing the service.

In addition the ACT Government contributes the majority of the operational funding of the service.

3. The increase in fees that happen to coincide with the application are simple recognition of the increased costs of providing the service. In particular ensuring ongoing locum availability in a declining workforce market. It should be noted that the current fees have not altered since Feb 2008. During this period the gap between average in hours consultation fees and afterhours fees has narrowed considerably. Indeed as the majority of afterhours services attract a higher Medicare rebate a patient is currently often better off after seeing a doctor afterhours in the act than they would be seeing a GP during the day. It is the belief of the Board that it is imperative that a price signal be maintained between

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the cost of the everyday in hours service and an afterhours consult to avoid a significant shift of the inhours workload to the afterhours period.

4. It is difficult to give exact detail on the proportion of consults charged less than the maximum fee. However as a minimum it would be 10-15% as the vast majority of visits to RACF are still bulk billed and the locums do bulk bill or charge veterans affairs directly on occasion for consults. As part of the schedule CALMS also recognise a reduced rate for pension card holders. In effect this is a reduced fee mandated by the schedule that would otherwise not exist.

Compliance with the schedule is monitored in a number of ways. Management has access to financial reports of the locums that detail the individual billing on a given shift. Owners of the service are provided copies of consult notes and receive feedback from their patients that have attended the service and Locums provide feedback to the service on the suitability of the fee schedule in maintaining their desire to work on the service.

The service is able to state that our numbers have increased steadily over the period since 2005. In the calendar year 2010 CALMS locums conducted a total of 18,974 consults an increase of nearly 50% since 2005. Our numbers continue to grow.

Whilst CALMS has no access to information on Public Hospital numbers, Nursing Home numbers or Ambulance service numbers it would be fair to say that we enjoy an excellent relationship each of the above sectors and anecdotally it is felt that were CALMS Not to operate in its current form some of the 19,000 plus consults per year would increase the workload on the services detailed above.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information or indeed clarification of the information provided above.

Sincerely



Graeme Sellar  
General Manager  
CALMS LTD.

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