



MEDIA RELEASE

11 Aug 2010

The National Institute of Integrative Medicine (NIIM) is a medical facility for the research, education and practice of Integrative Medicine. NIIM strongly advocates for the support of doctors practising long consultations, and is concerned with the decline in Long Consultation item numbers utilized by General Practitioners since 2007 as recently reported in the Medical Journal of Australia¹

It is well established and supported by a body of evidence, that Long Consultations, particularly when treating patients with complex medical problems, has overwhelming benefits for the patient, doctor and for preventative health in general.

NIIM adds its support to the list of medical establishments voicing their concern on this important issue. Long Consultations have been supported in principal by the RACGP; The AMA in their recent "Key Health Issues for the 2010 Federal Election" support the increase in Medicare rebates to improved care for chronically ill and complex patients and access to longer consultations; The Australasian Integrative Medicine Association which is the peak medical body representing integrative doctors, has campaigned for Long Consultations and produced a position paper on this topic. Just very recently the Coalition has pledged to increase patient rebates for longer consultations (6 minutes, 6 Aug 2010).

Prof Avni Sali, Director of NIIM, believes it is high time the issue of Long Consultations is taken seriously and that doctors practising long consultations are rewarded and not penalised as is currently happening. While patients and doctors are reporting a rapidly increasing need for a longer, more supportive consultation, the current Medicare system is in direct opposition to this. GP's providing a higher than average proportion of longer consultations are more likely to be investigated by Medicare to undergo review, and to be penalised for doing so. Clearly this creates an incentive for doctors to maintain shorter consultations under threat of investigation.

Within this system, patients directly suffer from the lack of care which should be afforded to them *prior* to life threatening illness, and the wider community suffers the economic burden of a population afflicted by chronic disease and ADEs (adverse drug events), both of which are largely eased with the benefits of a longer consultation.

NIIM supports the practice of long consultation and urges the government to support the doctors practising long consultations with their patients.

1 Michael J Taylor, Dell Horey, Charles Livingstone and Hal Swerissen. Decline with a capital D: long-term changes in general practice consultation patterns across Australia. MJA 2010; 193 (2): 80-83

For further details contact:

Professor Avni Sali, or Anna Ryan

National Institute of Integrative Medicine

759 Burwood Road, Hawthorn East, Victoria 3123

Ph: (03) 9804-0646

E: annaryan@niim.com.au