

MEDIA RELEASE

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PATIENT SAFETY THREATENED BY MEDIBANK PRIVATE'S HEAVY HANDED APPROACH

Medibank Private is threatening the national effort to improve safety and quality in Australian hospitals by its proposal to limit with hospitals the cover for patients insured with Medibank Private in certain situations.

Eminent medical and nursing clinicians across the country have been working closely with the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) to develop a list of potentially preventable hospital complications. This list is still in the validation phase and is currently being tested in hospitals across Australia.

“Medibank Private’s action to use its market power to, as it said to the media, ‘flex its muscles’ in negotiations with private hospitals by introducing its own list of 165 events created without consultation with ACSQHC is adverse to the interests of patients and flies in the face of improved clinical care,” warns Suzanne Greenwood, Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Health Australia.

“Acting as a rogue, ignoring the work of the Commission, shows Medibank Private is not truly interested to develop a consistent approach nationally. Walking away from contract negotiations with Calvary Health Care is short-sighted. Now is the time for an evidence-based approach to safety and quality and Medibank Private needs to work with the Commission, not against it.”

“It is concerning that Medibank Private is pushing its own quality and safety measures ahead of the Commission’s validation, testing and launch of its position statement on the use of patient safety indicators and adverse events generated from administrative hospital datasets,” concluded Mrs Greenwood.

“In order to truly deliver better safety and quality for patients in Australian hospitals, Medibank Private should work more closely with hospitals, health care professionals, consumers and the Australian Commission on Quality and Safety in Health Care in the development of the ACSQHC’s own list of preventable events, rather than dictating its own list and without producing acceptable evidence or proposing avenues for review and consultation,” Mrs Greenwood said today.

“By seeking to unilaterally impose contract terms that would penalise hospitals for events that do not take account of either clinical context or the risk profile of individual patients, Medibank Private is jumping the gun and jeopardising the progress of this essential work,” she added.

The objective for Calvary Health Care to work with the Commission in being a test site is to assist with the rigor and testing of the Commission’s list and so to improve the quality and safety of health care provision in Australian hospitals. For Medibank Private to develop their list independent of the collaborative nature of ACSQHC processes suggests a greater motivation to protect shareholder interests and not patient interests.

“Calvary Health Care is stepping into the shoes of David against Goliath, but other hospitals are closely watching the conduct of the health insurance giant,” Mrs Greenwood said.

Prudential requirements on health funds are strict and Medibank Private is an exemplar for compliance, but this issue is about patient care—it is the hospitals and their clinical teams who should make decisions as to what is the best clinical care for patients, not the insurer,” warned Mrs Greenwood.

Calvary Health Care and Medibank Private will meet in independent mediation this week.

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Catholic Health Australia (CHA) represents 75 public and private Catholic hospitals across Australia