

# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT CARNARVON  
FRIDAY, 29 AUGUST 2014**

### **SESSION SEVEN**

#### **Members**

**Hon Liz Behjat (Chairman)**  
**Hon Darren West (Deputy Chairman)**  
**Hon Nigel Hallett**  
**Hon Jacqui Boydell**  
**Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson**

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**Hearing commenced at 2.47 pm**

**Ms FIONA JOY HEPPL**  
**sworn and examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** Hello; how are you?

**Ms Hepple:** Hello; I am good.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Fiona, you were not here earlier today, so let me introduce to you our committee. My name is Liz Behjat, I am the chairman of the committee, and I represent the North Metropolitan Region of Western Australia; and we also have Hon Nigel Hallett, who is a representative of the South West Region of Western Australia; Hon Jacqui Boydell, whom you may know, who is from this region, the Mining and Pastoral Region; and we have two committee members who are not with us today who represent other regions. We also have with us here Felicity Mackie, who is our advisory officer, legal, for the purposes of this hearing. The first thing I need you to do is to take an oath or an affirmation off that blue form that you have in front of you.

[Witness took the oath.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is terrific that you have done that bit now. We have your contact address from your witness form, so we will not need you to say that out loud on the record. The capacity in which you are appearing in front of us today is as a private citizen?

**Ms Hepple:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood that document?

**Ms Hepple:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record. Please be aware of the microphone and try to speak into it. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement because you are not comfortable saying what you want to say to us today in the public hearing, you can ask us to go into a closed session. We will consider that request, and, if it is granted, we will clear the room of any public and media who might be here. But if you are happy for it to be on the public record, then fine. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege. Do not be put off by any of those words; they are the formalities.

**Ms Hepple:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We want to make this process as comfortable as possible for you and we thank you for taking the time to come today to tell us your PATS story, if you would like.

[2.50 pm]

**Ms Hepple:** My 17-year-old daughter has a problem with impacted teeth. She went to Dr Makhdoom at Carnarvon dental hospital, who referred her to Dr Harris Greenberg for removal because they could not be done by a dentist; they had to be done by a specialist oral and maxillofacial surgeon. We were denied PATS for the initial consultation with him because they said

it was not dental. We attended the consultation. She has an appointment for 24 September in Geraldton. The next referral was written by Dr Eze at Carnarvon Medical Centre because she is having recurrent issues with her teeth related to bone—infections and migraines et cetera. He put in that referral as well. That was denied PATS as well. Also, being under 18 she is entitled to a \$1 000 Medicare rebate—are you aware of that? She cannot claim the Medicare rebate because it is not dental; it is classed as oral maxillofacial surgery. She cannot get PATS because they are claiming it as dental. That is my issue today.

**The CHAIRMAN:** There is the issue of Medicare being a commonwealth scheme and PATS being a state scheme, and they do not want to talk to each other. I think that is what you are experiencing there.

**Ms Hepple:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Fiona, these are obviously matters that are on foot at the moment. Our committee does not have any ability to take this on board as a case for you. That is not the purpose of the committee's inquiry. Let me put it another way: this is very good information for us when considering our report as to how things should work in the future for other people accessing this scheme. I would certainly hazard a guess that this committee will not be ready to make its final report and recommendations for quite some time yet. Given that the 24 September appointment is going to come and go, and I cannot let you leave here today with a feeling that we might somehow be able to resolve it, there are obviously steps that you can take in relation to exceptional circumstances applications through the PAT scheme.

**Ms Hepple:** At the hospital, she did not give me any information; she just said it is denied.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We are not the administrators of the system. I think the best advice I could give is for you to make an appointment to see Gerry Burns. I am putting him on the spot here. He is at the Carnarvon Hospital. Tell him that you need to appeal that decision that has been made and you wish to apply for exceptional circumstances for your daughter to see whether something can be done to assist her in this instance. What you bring up is a very good point. PATS used to be a commonwealth scheme. That scheme ended and the states took it on some years ago. That is a good example of where commonwealth health services and state health services try to mind the gap basically.

**Ms Hepple:** It clearly states on here that he is not a dentist. That is my issue. She is not going to a dentist; she is going to this specialist.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Evidence was given to us in a different town this week about a woman who had a problem with her tongue. She was denied access to the PAT scheme because it was deemed to be something to do with dental. But it was not; it was something that was wrong with her tongue. If it was something that was wrong in a different part of her body—the actual whatever it was—that would not have been a question. But because it was her tongue, they said, “No, that's dental; you don't qualify.” She had to go through that process of applying for exceptional circumstances to have someone sit and look subjectively at something. Hopefully, you might be able to get a resolution that way. It is not something that the committee is able to take on board, but we do appreciate you giving us this information.

**Ms Hepple:** Just with the flippancy of it, when I did put in the second PATS, she said, “I had to have braces and I didn't get PATS.” I said, “You're not having your jaw drilled out, are you?” She said, “No; it's declined.”

**The CHAIRMAN:** As I said, if you see Gerry or one of the people at the hospital and say, “The committee sent me!” We will see what happens. Good luck with it. I hope that you can find a resolution for it. This information is good for us.

**Hearing concluded at 2.55 pm**

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