

Private health rebate removal - why?



As you are probably aware by now, as of 1 April you will no longer be able to claim part of your naturopathic consultation on your private health insurance. This is due to a flawed government review that found there is “no evidence that naturopathy works”. However, their study carefully included only papers looking at naturopathy as a whole health service, specifically excluding the hundreds of thousands of statistically significant research papers looking at individual herbs, minerals, vitamins, nutrients and lifestyle techniques and their impact on various conditions and health states. They also didn’t acknowledge the incredible clinical results we as naturopathic see in our practice every day. Even though their overarching message to the public is that there is no evidence, their report itself actually stressed that the findings should not be taken to infer that the therapy is not effective!



Discrediting natural medicine

There does seem to be a real movement out there to discredit natural medicine and you can't help but to wonder how much of it comes from the pharmaceutical companies who are financially able to be very persuasive. Some even see the removal of the rebate as a move to reduce confidence in the profession rather than being about saving tax payer dollars. Every so often you'll see an overinflated report claiming someone to have had an adverse reaction to a natural medicine. There is of course a small potential for this when natural medicines are overused or misused, incorrectly combined with pharmaceuticals or purchased from unregulated overseas sources. (See my previous blog "Self Prescribing from the internet – What could go wrong?") This in itself forms a strong argument for why the need to consult with a qualified naturopath before embarking on any natural or alternative health treatments. It is important to bear in mind that the number of actual adverse events from natural medicines is vastly and overwhelmingly outweighed by the huge number of adverse events, irreparable damage and deaths caused by pharmaceutical medications every day. This never seems to be reported with quite the same enthusiasm.

Natural medicine

Natural medicine has so much potential to benefit health in the long term, especially when it comes to prevention and those chronic conditions for which conventional medicine has no real solution. An important niche area for naturopathy is when you know you just don't feel right yet your doctor claims they can't find anything wrong with you. (See my previous blog on "Naturopathy's Sweet Spot in Healthcare".) Nothing shows up in your blood tests and your doctor is not able to give you any diagnosis and therefore no matching drug. If people feel they can no longer choose to see a natural health care practitioner, they will instead be forced to continue seeking a new opinion from doctor after doctor. This puts further strain on the medical system and eventually outweighs any potential small financial gain that may be made from removing the rebate.

Many of my patients receive only a token rebate from their consult fee anyway, so it is my hope that people continue to use naturopathy despite losing this benefit. In the meantime, be assured you that there are a number of bodies out there still campaigning against this change and we are always hopeful of it being overruled or reversed in the future.