

## **Statement from Northside Clinic Directors regarding patient fees and patients with outstanding debt.**

We write to update our patients and inform you on our position on how the clinic will be handling outstanding patient debt and to address some of the negative comments made online regarding fees.

Our ethos at Northside Clinic has from the beginning, been about accessibility and providing high quality healthcare for all members of the community. However, like a lot of businesses, we are facing a potentially financially turbulent period, and cannot continue to operate at 2020 prices when we have 2024 expenses.

We have unfortunately had to make the difficult decision to stop routinely Bulk Billing Concession Card holders with the introduction of a Concessional fee, and we have also had to implement regular fee increases.

Neither of those decisions were done on a whim.

Our aim is to provide a high level of care to all our patients, and that needs to be balanced with retaining the highly skilled doctors who consult here at Northside Clinic.

GPs are not immune to the pinch of the rising costs of living. When compared to other Specialist areas, GPs earn significantly less.

Perhaps what people do not realise is that GPs are contractors and are therefore required to pay the clinic for utilising the rooms, the administration staff, the nursing staff, the treatment room materials. They also need to pay themselves and contribute to their superannuation from what they earn. They do not get paid sick leave or annual leave. When they don't work, they don't get paid. If patients don't pay a gap fee for their appointments, doctors receive a much lower payment, and the clinic receives even less.

Since the clinic has made changes to our billing policy and increased fees, we have received a lot of feedback about the clinic being money hungry and going for cash grabs.

During a time when we are trying our best to keep our services accessible and affordable, we are experiencing what we can only refer to as a disappointing response. People have been very happy to come here for exceptional service when they didn't have to pay, then at a time of need when we ask some of you to now pay for that service, it feels like some of our loyal patients are turning on us.

If you are a patient, you would know that we are humble in what we do, we prioritise our patients and our contracting Dr's echo our ethos.

If you are no longer happy to attend the clinic and pay for your service, you are more than welcome to attend another clinic. Our Doctors are human, and they will understand your individual situation if you are struggling financially, however if you are charged for a service, please respect that and settle your account on the day.

We have always required your account to be settled on the day of your appointment. To help you achieve that, we have provided for you the option to have your rebate paid directly back into your account; we have provided the service for online payments that is linked directly to your patient account.

However, some patients have not paid on the day. Due to a large amount of unpaid patient debt, we are needing to address this and will be implementing the following policy. Any unpaid patient account that is outstanding for 3 months, will result in you no longer being able to book an appointment at the clinic. This will come into effect December 1<sup>st</sup> 2024.

You will receive multiple reminders to pay your account, however the final notice will be informing you of the above. Medicare has a small window for the submission of patient activity. We need to report this activity and if we are required to write off your unpaid service, then you are not welcome back.

This may feel like an extreme measure, however, we cannot continue to carry the debt of unpaid patient accounts.

We do appreciate the continued support of dedicated patients and we implore you to please provide feedback to your local and state MP and health ministers, to help General Practice fight for better Medicare rebates and funding.

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