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Press release: Doctors' Fees

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DOCTORS' FEES

25.7.73

The report of the inquiry by South Australia's Prices Commissioner (Mr. Baker) into doctors' fees was tabled in State Parliament today by the Premier, Mr. Dunstan.

The Government has accepted the report.

The Commissioner's main findings are:

- . He accepts that there may be some merit in a four-tier structure for surgery consultations, home and hospital based on time but says the A.M.A. recommended levels are too high.
- . Rejects charging a separate fee for a procedure performed during a consultation in addition to the fee for the associated visit and instead believes that only one fee should be charged.
- . Rejects the adoption of a \$4 surcharge for out-of-hours services, but accepts the possible validity of a nominal surcharge of 50 cents to \$1 if such be the findings of the Federal Tribunal.
- . Rejects any attempt to bring South Australia into line with the national level of fees and says the A.M.A. has completely ignored differentials in living costs and average weekly earnings between the States.
- . Accepts an interim rise of 12½% in the most common fee in South Australia, pending the findings of the Medical Fees Tribunal. This would be \$3.85 for surgery consultations and \$5.90 for home visits. The A.M.A. recommends an increase of 26.5% for a standard consultation.
- . Accepts an increase for antenatal, confinement and postnatal care to \$60 when performed by a G.P.
- . Recommends no alteration in other fees.

The Commissioner said the alternatives before the Government, were:

- . To take no action until after the Federal Tribunal's findings, in which case the majority of S.A. doctors would probably raise their fees to the A.M.A. recommended level on August 6.
- . To bring services provided by medical practitioners under price control.

The Commissioner noted that over the past ten years the growth rate in doctors' net incomes outstripped that of average weekly earnings by a substantial margin.

Over the past three years doctors' net incomes rose by 54% compared with 34% in average weekly earnings for the same period.

Mr. Dunstan said the State Government accepted the Prices Commissioner's fee recommendations as an interim measure pending the findings of the Medical Fees Tribunal established by the Federal Government.

The Premier said he had written to the President of the A.M.A. and Secretary of the General Practitioners Society in South Australia asking whether the A.M.A. and G.P.S. were prepared and able to give an undertaking that all their members will comply with the Commissioner's recommendations.

"I said I required this assurance by the end of this month," the Premier said.