



President's Catch Up, March 2019

Parliamentary Inquiry

Due to a lengthy period of intense lobbying by the Australasian Sleep Association (ASA) and the Sleep Health Foundation (SHF) the Federal Minister for Health Aged Care and Sport, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, agreed to support our call for a Parliamentary Inquiry into Sleep Health Awareness in Australia. A total of 130 submissions were received by the Committee for Health, Aged Care and Sport and public hearings were held around the country between late January and early February 2019. The submissions are available for everyone to read on the [Inquiry Website](#) and transcripts of the Public Hearings are accessible via Hansard, the official record of all parliamentary proceedings.

Many ASA members were involved in making submissions and speaking at the hearings. Those of us who attended the final Public Hearings in Canberra were impressed with the level of understanding by the Committee of the numerous health issues related to sleep. It was clear that the need to take sleep health seriously, indeed to consider it as the third pillar of good health, was accepted by all sides of government.

We now find ourselves in a 'holding pattern' waiting the release of the report, which hopefully will happen prior to the General Election being called. The ASA and SHF's joint 'Advocacy Working Party' continues to meet regularly and work with Executive Counsel Australia to plan for what we hope will be a number of positive recommendations. As soon as the report is released, I'll be in touch again.

Sleep Health in Australia's Federal Parliament House

During the many meetings and discussions with parliamentarians a regular comment was the negative effect that their long working hours had on the quality and quantity of their own sleep, particularly during Parliamentary sitting times. These comments prompted the ASA and the SHF to undertake a study to objectively measure the sleep behaviours of those working in Parliament House, including Federal politicians, their staff and members of the media. 74 parliamentarians were studied by wearing Actigraphs over a 3 week period that included two sitting week and one week at home.

The study showed that half of all participants were not achieving the recommended 7-9 hours of sleep for adults. Of particular concern was that during the weekdays of the sitting period some participants slept for as little as 3½ hours per night. For a full copy of the report [CLICK HERE](#)

MBS Item Numbers:

These have now been in place for 4 months, and it appears that most sleep services are adapting to the changes. The number of questions directed to our Clinical Chair, Sutapa Mukherjee, have reduced considerably over the past month. The Clinical Committee continues to liaise with the Department of Health with regard to the interpretation of the new Item Numbers, and the ASA will be participating in a re-commissioned TMCC (Thoracic Medicine Clinical Committee of DoH) to review the item numbers over the next few months. Related information can be found from the Department of Health, a recording of the session held at SDU2018 and responses to FAQs can be found in the Members Only Section of the ASA Website [HERE](#).

Private Health Insurance Reform

Legislation to reform the Private Health Insurance act passed on October 15th, and will come into effect on the 1st of April. The stated intention of the Government is to make it simpler for

consumers to understand what their Insurance Cover must include – with Basic, Bronze, Silver, and Gold levels. Unfortunately this list only includes Sleep Studies under Gold cover which could restrict access to lab based sleep studies in private services and put huge pressure on the already struggling public system, further limiting access to sleep studies. The ASA leadership have met with staff from the Department of Health and also with Rachel David, Head of Private Health Australia, raising concerns about these changes. Rachel David had advised that while it would not be mandatory for PHI companies to cover sleep services under bronze or silver many of the larger companies had indicated that they would continue to cover them. The impact of these changes will be reviewed after about 6 months, and the ASA has gathered information from all the Public Services about waiting times and services offered, and will be following up on this after 6 months and 12 months to see what affect these changes have had. It is hoped that we will also be able to gather this information for Private Sleep Services in the future.

Audit of Sleep Physicians

The ASA has been in touch with the Department of Health in regard the audit of sleep physicians, and ways that the ASA can work with the Professional Services Review (PSR Agency) to minimise the impact of these audits on our members. Maree Barnes, Sutapa Mukherjee and I have all now met with Julie Quinlivan, Director of PSR, and will continue to work with them. Julie Quinlivan has kindly agreed to speak at a special session at Sleep DownUnder 2019, to be held immediately after the ASA AGM. She will be talking on: **What happens if you are referred to the Professional Services Review and what constitutes inappropriate practice**. This should be a very interesting and informative session and I invite all members to attend.

Peter Eastwood
President