TV show points finger at GPs for much of Medicare waste

29 September, 2015  Paul Smith

An investigation into Medicare by ABC TV’s Four Corners program claims 30% of the health budget is being wasted and GPs are often to blame.

Celebrated health journalist Dr Norman Swan, who presents the show, says too many people who visit their GP have no idea where the consultation will end up — like getting on a train, he says, and not knowing its destination. He raises familiar topics, such as the value of imaging for back and knee pain, PSA screening, and the use of angiograms and stenting.

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As a patient’s first point of contact with the health system, GPs are a major cause of the problems for not having the confidence to clinically manage patients without ordering unnecessary tests and scripts, Dr Swan claims.

The documentary ends by calling on patients to take matters into their own hands and to ask their GPs what the evidence is for the tests and treatments they are being prescribed.

Some doctors this morning have described the program as an exercise in GP bashing.

Watch a clip of the show below and the full documentary on Four Corners here

Did you watch the show? Let us know what you thought in the DISQUS section below.
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rob • 1 hour ago

Didn't watch the program as I new it would be about doctor bashing!
Interesting to note the partisan views currently being expressed. Government, media on one side AMA on the other, RACGP opting for the middle ground. One group who appear currently left out of the debate, who I would be most interested in listening to, are the MDO's. I would probably take more notice of them than most of the others.

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Dr. Who • 2 hours ago

There's something really annoying about Swan. His pontificating viewpoints that just mirror the ABC ant-elitist eternal dogma are as ever present as a bad odor at a sewage farm. If we're going to address wasting public money, let's start with a public broadcaster, that unremittingly pushes its social agenda on the vulnerable and gullible Australian viewing public.

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message1 • 3 hours ago

No one should be afraid of review. If it improves practice and lessens the burden on wasting the dollar on unnecessary medical investigations and procedures and allowing new evidence based technologies, isn't that a good thing?

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dr • 9 hours ago

can't we go to court over what I consider to be misleading information, I think AMA should look into some legal action, we can't generalise things, the friends who agree may not be confident of their referral and path/imaging requests

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ihadesorg [Glenn Rosendahl] • 11 hours ago

Norman Swan's essential problem is that he has not differentiated between the processes of population/public health and clinical practice. He should have learned the difference in medical school. Had he had any professional experience of clinical practice, he would know just like you and I know it. Nor has he submitted his current research - as a paper - to formal peer review. There are academics (and clinicians) who research medical conditions, methods of diagnosis and clinical management. They assemble data and analyse it with normative and statistical methodology. Develop conclusions, firstly discuss their findings in their local academic peer group, write the paper, submit it to more extensive peer review, then publish. We can read and draw our own conclusions. Our clinical practice is informed by this information. But the management of an individual patient, with a particular, specific problem, is a completely different process. For patient care to go with a problem...
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