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# GP staff cold-called in pay and conditions crackdown



[Julie Lambert \(/author/julie-lambert\)](#) 9 February 2016



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MEDICAL reception staff are being cold-called at work as part of a random audit campaign that could lead to practice owners copping fines of up to \$54,000 for breaches of pay and conditions.

So far, random audits have targeted several hundred practices in Queensland alone, Medical Observer has been told.

Practice owners have been alarmed to find inspectors from Fair Work Australia have directly questioned staff rather than contacting them, fearing the tactic could create misunderstandings.

Practice consultant David Dahm, CEO of Health and Life, says he has received a number of calls from practices worried about the tactic.

"The biggest problem is that if someone misspeaks on the phone, talking about something they are not clear about, it can be very difficult to unsay," he says.

"It can also hurt morale, leading staff to think the boss is doing the wrong thing."

The national campaign is focusing on award compliance in the allied health, medical services and residential care sectors, drawing on intelligence and advice from stakeholders including the AMA, Leading Age Services Australia, Optometry Australia and United Voice, Fair Work Australia says.

"Fair Work inspectors will check up to 600 employers over the coming months to ensure their businesses are paying the correct minimum hourly rates, penalty rates, allowances and loadings and providing appropriate meal breaks," the agency said announcing the move in December.

"Compliance with record-keeping and pay-slip obligations will also be monitored."

The campaign has not produced "results" so far, a Fair Work Ombudsman's office spokesperson told MO on Tuesday.

The crackdown is aimed at medical receptionists, dental assistants and receptionists, disability support workers, personal care attendants, nursing assistants and others.

Relevant awards are the Health Professionals and Support Services Award, the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award, the Aged Care Award and the Clerks – Private Sector Award.

The agency says it receives calls from more than 3000 people in the health care and social assistance sector each month and has recovered more than \$7 million for 5300 underpaid employees in the sector in the past four and a half years.

It says 43 health care and social assistance employers have been cautioned in the past three years,

Penalties for breaches of the Fair Work Act were increased last year to \$54,000 for a corporation and \$10,800 for an individual.

As part of the ongoing compliance campaign, the agency is offering resources to update employers on their obligations.

But a requirement to log in to access the information may make some practices wary of attracting the auditors' attention, Mr Dahm says.

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## Author: Julie Lambert



### Political Reporter

Julie Lambert covers politics for Medical Observer, with special interests in public health, rural medicine, business, medico-legal matters and the environment. She was formerly chief sub-editor at Australian Associated Press and a business reporter and editor in Japan.

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