

Youth Suicide - Not an issue for political point scoring

**National Association of Practising Psychiatrists
Media Release 28 January 1999**

"The Federal Health Minister, Dr Michael Wooldridge is engaging in the politics of blame and diversion in a desperate attempt to deflect attention from Australia's rising youth suicide rate despite millions of dollars being spent on Commonwealth programmes which were supposed to relieve the problem", President of the National Association of Practising Psychiatrists, Dr Gil Anaf said in Adelaide today.

"Dr Wooldridge has been a consistent denigrator of long term psychotherapy claiming an incidence of over servicing by a Dr 747 as his justification for slashing access to long term psychiatric care for those Australians who rely on this therapy to maintain their functioning. Despite repeated requests to politicians from all political parties, we have never been able to have this incident of over servicing substantiated", Dr Anaf said.

Sydney psychiatrist and former President of the Psychotherapy Association of Australia, Dr Isla Lonie, said "When the item number changes were introduced, the protests of the many psychiatrists who wrote to the Government expressing fears that this move would result in increased rates of death by suicide, were dismissed by Dr Wooldridge as 'shroud-waving'"

"Policies which are making it increasingly difficult to spend time listening to patients, also make it difficult for patients to receive the help they need, when they need it. This may very properly include intensive work."

"Since the Government has been keen to introduce disincentives for psychiatrists to spend more than one hour a week with their patients, it should be prepared to examine whether there is evidence that this has led to increased suicide rates in a properly evaluated study" said Dr Lonie.

"It is particularly disturbing for psychiatrists' patients, many of whom have little sense of self-worth or entitlement to adequate care, to read that the Minister considers that the psychiatrists who do spend time listening to their patients are engaging in a 'giant rip-off' ".

"Many, if not all, suicidal people already carry a burden of guilt, and are all too ready to agree that others should be the ones worthy of treatment, while they should be denied. All this approach does is to increase their feelings of hopelessness" said Dr Lonie.

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