

Psychiatrists want to know what international health care agreement will do for sufferers of mental illness

**National Association of Practising Psychiatrists
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The ongoing abuse of psychiatric patients by profit driven Health Maintenance Organisations (HMOs) in the US will be a major concern for Australian psychiatrists and their patients following reports that an international health care agreement will be discussed at the forthcoming World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Seattle in November, said Dr Gil Anaf, President of the National Association of Practising Psychiatrists (NAPP) in Adelaide today.

"We have only just discovered this push for a new world wide agreement and while the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) apparently has no plans to sign the agreement at this conference they have confirmed that it is on the WTO's agenda," said Dr Anaf.

DFAT has also confirmed that the group pushing for this agreement is one of the most powerful lobby groups in World Trade known as the US Coalition of Service Industries, which comprises the same problematic HMOs.

The agreement would seek to remove any regulation that would stop the spread of American health care into Australia. Europe is also being targeted. In particular, regulations for public health are seen as an obstacle that must be overcome to increase profits.

"Patients with mental illness in the US have been exploited by greedy companies some of whom have been subject to legal action and FBI investigations," said Dr Anaf.

"Australian patients with mental illness are still suffering since Item 319 was invoked, health funds are trying to find ways of reducing the costs of treating psychiatric patients even further, and now we have an ambitious push by US health care corporations to bring their Managed Care culture to Australia."

"At a time when America is attempting to regulate the blights of this system the main players are trying to move offshore and find easier targets. We must make sure that Australia is not one of them."

"NAPP will make its views strongly felt in Canberra on this issue. We welcome DFAT's initial response to our concerns and their stated desire to take seriously what we have to say but we remain concerned," said Dr Anaf.

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