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Breast  
Cancer  
Network  
Australia



## **Breast Cancer Network Australia Submission to the Medical Services Advisory Committee**

### **Consultation Decision Analytical Protocol 1332 – Second Opinion for Morphological/Interpretive Pathology**

**15 November 2013**

#### **About Breast Cancer Network Australia**

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) is the peak national organisation for Australians personally affected by breast cancer. We support, inform, represent and connect people whose lives have been affected by breast cancer.

BCNA represents more than 85,000 individual members and 310 Member Groups from across Australia.

BCNA works to ensure that women diagnosed with breast cancer and their families receive the very best information, treatment, care and support possible.

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Medical Services Advisory Committee's Consultation Protocol 1332 regarding second opinion for morphological/interpretive pathology.

BCNA is a consumer advocacy group. Our functions include representing the views of people affected by breast cancer. As such, we are unable to comment on the clinical details of the proposal as this falls outside the ambit of our expertise. We have reviewed the proposal with the experiences of women and men with breast cancer in mind.

BCNA works closely with breast cancer clinicians and key industry organisations, such as the Medical Oncology Group of Australia, to help improve the treatment and care of women. We have enjoyed a close relationship with the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, having published a comprehensive fact sheet for women titled *Breast cancer pathology* in partnership with them.

BCNA consults with pathologists to help us better represent the needs of women as needed, and benefits from the advice and expertise of an experienced pathologist on our Strategic Advisory Group.

We understand the importance of accurate and timely pathology results for women with breast cancer. Pathology results ultimately set the course for a woman's future treatment beyond her surgery. Breast cancer is a complex disease with many sub-types, and women

want to feel assured about the accuracy of their diagnosis, and that they are recommended treatment that best suits their particular type of cancer. With this in mind, we certainly support improved and timely availability to second expert opinions for pathology where required.

However, BCNA is keen to better understand the impact of this proposal on women with breast cancer.

As outlined in the submission, we note that a Medicare rebate may lead to improved access to expert pathology opinions by pathology laboratories in regional areas. However, we are concerned that a rebate for second opinion on pathology items will result in additional out of pocket costs for women.

Women with breast cancer face significant out of pockets costs for a range of medical tests and treatments related to the disease. Some of these are ongoing, and include diagnostic imaging tests, expenses related to breast reconstruction surgery, and myriad other diagnostic and treatment-related medical items. We would be concerned to see women out of pocket for a second opinion on her pathology report.

We further note that the proposal specifies that medical specialists are required to request that the original pathologist refer for a second expert opinion. We query whether the woman will be consulted before this request is made, and whether the specialist will be in a position to disclose any associated out of pocket costs of the additional laboratory testing to the woman.

We further query whether there is any scope to allow the woman herself to request a second opinion.

BCNA thanks the Medical Services Advisory Committee for the opportunity to provide comment on this proposal. We would be pleased to have our concerns addressed by the applicant to this proposal. Should you have any concerns or questions related to this comment, please contact me at [kwells@bcna.org.au](mailto:kwells@bcna.org.au) or (03) 9805 2562.

Yours faithfully



Kathy Wells  
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