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Owner – Health Policy

Advice No – HP00015

Date – 06 June 2018

Health Care in Regional Processing Countries

Background

The delivery of health care in Regional Processing Countries, namely Nauru and Papua New Guinea, is under the control of the Governments of those countries. In relation to persons transferred from Australia to those countries under regional processing arrangements, Australia supports the delivery of health care to such persons through contracted health service providers (HSPs).

For the purposes of this policy the term 'persons transferred from Australia' includes transferees, refugees and non-refugees.

Policy Position

Papua New Guinea

In recognition of the increased demand on PNG health care services resulting from regional processing arrangements, Australia will continue to support the delivery of health services to persons transferred under RPC arrangements through HSPs. Those services include:

- supplementary primary health care capacity – a medical service that will provide initial care
- through the supplementary primary health care capacity – referral to specialist services available in PNG as required
- some secondary level health care – the contracted service provider will arrange for required medical specialists to attend PNG to provide services that are unavailable through the PNG health care system
- medical care through Pacific International Hospital for conditions that cannot be treated at the ELRTC clinic, Lorengau Hospital or other public PNG hospitals
- supplementary mental health care services
- a latent emergency health care capability to be enlivened in the event of a health emergency that is unable to be fully resolved through the PNG emergency management health care system.

These services complement but do not replace the PNG health care system and will facilitate a person's access to that system.

Nauru

In recognition of the increased demand on Nauru health care services resulting from regional processing arrangements, Australia will continue to support the delivery of health services to persons transferred under those arrangements, through HSPs. Those services are:

- supplementary primary health care capacity – a medical service that will provide initial care

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- through the supplementary primary health care capacity – referral to specialist services available in Nauru as required
- some secondary level health care – the contracted service provider will arrange for required medical specialists to attend Nauru to provide services that are unavailable through the Nauruan health care system
- patient transfers to a third country, excluding Australia, for medical treatment that is unavailable in Nauru and where a relevant medical specialist cannot deliver that treatment in Nauru s33(a)(iii)
- supplementary mental health care services
- a latent emergency health care capability to be enlivened in the event of a health emergency that is unable to be fully resolved through the Nauru emergency management health care system.

These services complement but do not replace the Nauruan health care system and will facilitate a person's access to that system.

Health Service Delivery Principles

The HSP should provide health care and treatment according to the following health service principles:-

1. The self-determination of persons transferred from Australia must be acknowledged in relation to the provision of health care. People may choose to seek health care from the health care system within the country in which they reside, without reference to the contracted HSP. People may choose to decline recommended health care treatment.
2. Contracted health service providers must ensure that they have and maintain capacity and capability in PNG and Nauru to deliver the contracted health care services.
3. Care should be provided as close as possible to the patient.
4. The HSP must work with local health services and hospitals to deliver health care to persons transferred from Australia.
 - a. In Nauru or PNG, where the required health care service is unavailable for persons transferred from Australia through the Nauru or PNG public health system, the HSP will arrange for a medical specialist to travel to Nauru or PNG to deliver the service.
 - b. In exceptional circumstances where 4(a) is not possible owing to the s33(a)(iii) in Nauru or PNG, the HSP may recommend the temporary transfer of the person to a third country excluding Australia for that medical treatment and, in the event of such a transfer, will ensure that all relevant medical records and information is provided to the treating clinician in the receiving hospital.
5. Requests for medical transfers to Australia for medical treatment will only be considered for refugees and transferees transferred from Australia where the patient is suffering from a critical and complex medical condition which cannot be appropriately managed in Nauru, PNG or a third country and when specialist medical care is required to minimise the threat to life. That is, where the person faces a life-threatening medical emergency that would otherwise result in their death or permanent, significant disability.

Management of HSP contracts

The Government of Australia (GoA) will contract with HSP for the delivery of the above health services. When possible, those contracts will be novated to the relevant host country.

The GoA will not have any direct involvement in the delivery of health services in either Nauru or PNG. The GoA's role will be to ensure that the HSP is meeting the terms of the contract and to undertake contract

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assurance functions (for example, in relation to the times persons transferred from Australia wait for services) and quality reviews of the services.

The GoA will liaise with the GoN and GoPNG regarding the quality of services provided under the relevant contract and will ensure that the views of those governments are considered when undertaking contract management activities.

The GoA will facilitate and fund medical transfers under clauses 4(b) and 5 above.