



**AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION  
(SOUTH AUSTRALIA) INC**

**Dr Richard Southwood, AMA(SA) President 1983 – 1984**

My term as President saw the introduction of Medicare and the option to "bulk bill" patients. Both were planned for introduction in February 1984, but the flood of medicopolitical "to-ing and fro-ing" seemed to begin for me on the day of my induction. Much heat and a little light were produced from many discussions, media interviews and press conferences during the latter half of 1983 and the first few months of 1984.

Every political step seemed to be eroding the individuality of the doctor and of the patient. "Henry Ford" medicine may be satisfactory in the treatment of physical illness provided the production line quality is maintained but may lose the human touch. I believe this individuality is the magic and the satisfaction of medical work from the doctor's and from the patient's points of view.

I perused the AMA(SA) Council meeting records in the course of research for this summary and found that I established a "personal best" presidential activities list of 29 interviews during March 1984. We sat in the gallery at the House and listened to the then Minister for Health, Dr Cornwall, veterinarian, explain how everything would be so much better. During the course of his talk he flattered me with the term "smiling actor". I thought it was appropriate.

We rallied on the steps of Parliament House in the hope that this would show our concern. We came very close to a strike in April, with withdrawal of all but emergency medical services. To this day both bulk-billing and Medicare still supply much opportunity for debate and I continue to wonder why our political masters believe bulk-billing can be forced on the individual doctor or group medical practice.

We debated the size of signs to be used on a doctor's place of practice and deliberated on the role of "fringe medicine" services in our society – small and insignificant matters by present day standards, but still worthy of a collective opinion. We worried about the emerging drug culture which still plagues our society. In this regard education on all fronts seems the only way to reduce the problems and to save us collectively from ourselves.

Dr Blewett, Commonwealth Minister for Health, came to address us in November 1983.

The initiation and maintenance of a program for the detection of Scoliosis in school children was particularly pleasing to me as this was problem was one of my clinical interests at that time.

Contracts between hospitals and doctors were getting underway. My late father, Ray Southwood, a physician and public health idealist, commented during my term that the demise of the Honorary Consultant system in the public hospitals and the introduction of paid sessions was the first step towards the nationalisation of medicine. He was almost completely correct. I like to think that the team of 1983-4 did its best to at least delay this process. (read more about this change in the lead story. Ed.) During my term I was supported more than I deserved, and to the extent I needed, by the AMA(SA) membership and secretariat. I even remain grateful, in a masochistic way perhaps, to David King who pushed me into "giving it a go".