

Thursday, 15 November, 2012

## **ACTU summit to examine bosses increasing interference in workers' doctor visits**

An ACTU Work Health Rights summit in Melbourne today will discuss ways to tackle the growing trend of employers interfering in their workers' medical treatment.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Michael Borowick said that the summit, which would involve unions, and the Australian Medical Association, would hear of cases where employers had compromised workers' rights to privacy and proper medical treatment.

"How would you feel if your boss insisted on accompanying you when you saw the doctor for a workplace injury, or demanded access to your entire medical history?" Mr Borowick said.

"These invasions of privacy are becoming more and more common, and employees are often too intimidated to resist them."

"There is a growing trend of employers insisting injured workers visit company-approved doctors rather than a worker's own doctor."

"This can lead to substandard care that is focussed on employers' needs, rather than the health of the patient."

"We've also had reports of doctors being pressured to change medical certificates and return-to-work plans."

The summit will hear of employees are subject to intrusive and discriminatory behaviours by employers including:

- Employers or their representatives attending medical appointments with workers
- Injured workers being subject to constant medical assessments even after their doctor has cleared them to return to work
- Growth of Doctor Networks, funded by employers, and concerns that these are providing substandard care and sending injured workers back to work too soon
- Employers seeking access to ALL of a worker's health information rather than that directly linked to a workplace injury
- Employers inappropriately sharing medical information with third parties, such as insurers and superannuation funds

Fair Work Australia earlier this year found against Boral, after it insisted on sending a supervisor to accompany a worker to the doctor when he sought treatment for a workplace injury. Fair Work Australia found this policy placed "undue pressure" on the employee.

Mr Borowick said today's summit would discuss what changes were needed to protect workers, including amendments to the Privacy Act to protect workers' privacy.

"This is a clear sign of the importance of this issue and the growing concern amongst unions and the medical profession that patient privacy is being compromised by some employers."

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