

6minutes News

GP says he's been forced to leave town over 'exhausting' hospital referrals

Dr Brad Olsen says the situation has become so bad he's been banned from the public hospital



Carmel Sparke

31



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Save



A G.P says he is being forced to move towns because the local hospital keeps rejecting his patient referrals for no clinical reason.

Dr Brad Olsen from Bundaberg in Queensland claims the problem has been ongoing for the past 10 years.

His relationship with the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service has become so problematic that he has been banned from the hospital following an attempt to have one of his patients admitted.

“Of my referrals, they’re probably sending back about 30% without a reason, and that’s been getting worse,” Dr Olsen told *6minutes* ahead of his move to Brisbane.

“This is putting lives at risk.

“I’ve had issues with people with haemoglobin of 74, heart failure, and bilateral pleural effusions being knocked back.”

The hospital has strenuously denied rejecting referrals without justification.

“If a referral is missing critical information, or if it requests a service that is not provided at our facility, we will redirect or return the referral as appropriate,” it said in a statement.

31

Dr Olsen alleges in one case a referral was rejected for a patient who had a past history of bowel cancer and who “obviously need a colonoscopy”.

In another case, he says a request for a colonoscopy was rejected because blood tests were normal even though the patient had a history of polyps.

“I kept that letter because that was one even a medical student wouldn’t get wrong,” Dr Olsen said.

To make the situation even more difficult, the hospital sends patients a letter saying the referral has been rejected, rather than the doctor, Dr Olsen said.

One patient was told it was the GP’s error.

The patient lodged a complaint about Dr Olsen with AHPRA over the incident.

“I don’t do a lot of referrals to them. But the ones I do are serious, I do need their help,” he said.

“A lot of the stuff I handle myself. But there’s some things like colonoscopies and operations that a GP can’t do.”

He said he was exhausted by battling the hospital’s red tape and having to push so hard to have patients seen in the public system.

“I shouldn’t have to go chasing them to do their job all the time. It’s getting extremely fatiguing,” said Dr Olsen, who has been with the West Bundaberg Medical Centre for a decade.

He suggested one of the reasons behind the “policy of rejecting referrals” was because the public hospital wished to keep its waiting lists down – an allegation the hospital rejects.

“They do have limited resources, I understand that and I’m prepared to work with them, but this is just causing more work for me, which ultimately reflects back on them,” Dr Olsen said.

He said on the occasion he was banned from the hospital, it was related to his attempts to ensure a patient with severe anaemia and heart failure was seen by the hospital.

She had been sent home by the hospital three times, despite his referral letter, he said.

With his practice across the road from the hospital, he decided to visit in person to plead her case.

“At her third presentation, I went over there and said you’ve got to admit this lady, she’s extremely short of breath,” Dr Olsen said.

“And because I was upset and had a raised voice — I didn’t threaten anyone and I didn’t use foul language — the doctor over there still wouldn’t meet with me to try and sort this lady out.

“I was very concerned she might well pass away in the night.

“Now I’ve been banned from Queensland Health property.”

He said the patient was eventually admitted after Dr Olsen called paramedics who agreed she needed to be seen in hospital.

31

“I think because the ambulance said it was appropriate, [the hospital] did agree to see her,” he said.

Dr Olsen said he was able to speak out because he does not work for Queensland Health.

“I’ve made it no secret of why I’m leaving,” said Dr Olsen.

“I’m leaving this practice, I’m leaving this area, I’m going back to the city and won’t be in a rural or regional area anymore.

“Most other doctors don’t want to rock the boat because they are younger ...

“I can rock the boat, capsize it and then set it alight.”

Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service chief executive Deborah Carroll said the health service would take all steps to ensure staff were treated with respect and were safe.

“Abusive and aggressive behaviour toward our staff will not be tolerated,” Ms Carroll said in a statement.

She acknowledged there had been challenges in transitioning to a new Smart Referrals system.

“We categorically refute any claims that referrals are being returned in order to manipulate wait times,” she said.

But she said the hospital would endeavour to improve communications with GPs, and planned to hold meetings with doctors to discuss key issues, including referral management.

“We are planning to schedule GP engagement meetings in the near³¹ future to discuss key issues, including referral management.

“We commit to communicating better with GPs, especially around the reasons a referral has been returned,” she said.

“If a GP feels that a large number of their referrals are being returned, we urge them to contact our team, who can provide support and information.”

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