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ACC Review

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I qualified in 1977 with a Diploma in Physiotherapy from Auckland Technical Institute.

My motivation was to enter a career where people who were in need of rehabilitation would be given therapy regardless of status or income.

I worked in the Public Hospital system until 1979, when I bought a private practice and commenced my 22-year solo practitioner career.

At that time, ACC was in its infancy and there was a reasonable living to be made from private practice (largely funded by reimbursement for treatment by ACC for personal injury by accident).

At this stage, I feel there was a fundamental schism between ACC and private physiotherapy providers. Sadly a small number of unscrupulous private physiotherapy providers chose to charge ridiculous amounts for their services at the time when ACC would pay whatever fee was charged. This resulted in a cynical and prejudicial attitude toward private physiotherapy providers by ACC funders from there on, and a crackdown on fee levels and patient treatment eligibility.

This culture of distrust and prejudice was encouraged (regardless of the small number of errant providers) by ACC executive, their officers, and a succession of Ministers for ACC. This situation reached an all time low when ACC CEO, former accountant Jeff Chapman was at the helm and was quoted, when attending a physiotherapy private practitioners conference as saying, "If it wasn't for (ACC) these bastards wouldn't be having a conference." His implication being that 'greedy physios' were getting above their station, and were

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only in business because of the existence of ACC. This was in fact quite erroneous – private physiotherapy had been in existence for at least 40 years, funded both privately and by the Workers Compensation fund. Jeff Chapman's career as Auditor General ended shortly thereafter in conviction and jail for fraud while he was CEO of ACC.

In 2001 I finally closed the door on my practice in the low-income suburb of Mount Wellington, Auckland. After decades of low fees, suspicion and cynicism from ACC, I had to walk away for financial and health reasons. I was extremely stressed and was making a pathetic income from 12-hour days (often less than \$200 a week). The fee levels had not been increased for something like 12 years. The compliance costs of Accreditation (a prerequisite for Endorsed Provider status) were ridiculously prohibitive. The \$19 per treatment fee was a sick joke. In addition, my low income, low socio-economic demographic patients were in no position to pay surcharges to augment my meagre ACC fee income.

So, I quietly closed the door and walked away.

I feel that this was a loss to the community and the country. I trained for three years at the NZ taxpayer's expense; I worked extremely hard for those 22 years. I paid to attend regular conferences, workshops and seminars, I was a member of the NZ Manipulative Therapists Association, a member of NZ College of Physiotherapy, I was President of the Auckland Physiotherapists Private Practitioners Association, I had a recent Case Study on the treatment of low back pain published in the NZ Journal of Physiotherapy.

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