



Platypus

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AFP ROLE GROWS IN HEALTH SYSTEM ABUSE

Medi service frauds 'may be close to \$200m.'

Medifraud and overservicing by some members of the Australian medical profession was now 'quite staggering' — possibly as high as \$200 million a year, AFP Acting Assistant Commissioner (Investigations) Col Winchester, told the Australian Hospital Association's recent National Congress.

He said medifraud was repugnant because it was the public who had to pay for it.

The congress, attended by representatives of all Australian Hospital Associations, was held in Hobart.

Mr Winchester was speaking on the AFP's role in the growing abuse of the country's medical health system.

Acting Assistant Commissioner Winchester said that the doctor-patient relationship was regarded as sacrosanct.

"However, when it is abused so that a few may ransack the public purse for their own benefit, then I believe that not only should the full weight of the law be brought to bear on those responsible but that society should also be vocal in condemning them," he said.

The investigation of medifraud and overservicing was one of the AFP's priorities.

"To some it may appear that fraud is the principal dishonest practice and overservicing the secondary dishonest practice. However, our experience is that the reverse is true," he said.

"Overservicing is the primary dishonest practice and herein lies a problem for the AFP because it is not an offence against the criminal law."

There, were, however, preventive

measures within the Department of Health to deal with it.

Mr Winchester said the ingenuity of some members of the medical and associated professions to defraud knew no bounds.

"To me, medical fraud is the more repugnant because it involves the sick, the retarded, the aged and the vulnerable in a scheme whereby those on comparatively high incomes seek to gain at the expense of those clearly less fortunate.

"In the end, the expense falls on

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Christmas greetings — Commissioner

"As 1984 draws to a close, it is fair to say that the year has been one of the busiest, and in many respects, one of the most momentous in the AFP's short history.

We have achieved record drug seizure levels, continued the effective combatting of fraud against the Commonwealth in all its manifestations, continued to provide the highest level of community policing in the Capital Territory and assumed responsibility for directing and co-ordinating Australia's coastal surveillance. The violence directed at some family law court judges resulted in the provision of security arrangements by both the AFP and NSW police. This unattractive and demanding task, not part of the mainstream of policing, has been a credit to the uniformed side of the Force, as also is the general policing of Australia's major airports.

Administratively, the external Joint Management Review recommended major new reforms, many of which have now been implemented. There have been new initiatives in training and a different approach to the regional chains of command.

All were major achievements and I am well satisfied with the performance of the Force itself and the Public Service members.

But enough of That Was The Year That Was. Now is the time when our thoughts turn to the festive season and the New Year celebrations. Traditionally, these are times for the family and friends, yet for police officers, Christmas and New Year are often amongst the busiest and most demanding periods of all.

To all members, whether off duty, or to those who for service reasons have to defer their personal celebrations, and to their families, my best wishes for a Happy Christmas and for a good start to 1985."

Neighbourhood Watch program to get big boost in New Year

An AFP Neighbourhood Watch pilot program in Canberra has been so well received that a major extension of the scheme is to go ahead in 1985.

Up to 30 Watch schemes are to be launched in Canberra suburbs during the next year.

Inspector Graham Taylor has

been appointed as OIC of this program.

The response to the pilot scheme in the suburb of Kambah has been one of 'extreme enthusiasm', Sergeant Alex Fyfe, in charge of Community Relations, said.

Neighbourhood Watch is a community-based program in which residents become personally involved in crime prevention. It has had considerable success overseas and has recently been introduced to Australia.

"We are receiving calls daily from Kambah residents reporting things that are occurring in their area," Sergeant Fyfe said.

The pilot scheme was opened recently with 400 people from 600 houses in the selected area attending the initial meeting.

"This was not a bad effort," he said. "The Watch has brought the people of this area together. They are identifying their own area as belonging to a cell in which they are playing a leading part in controlling the spread of crime in their neighbourhood."

The pilot scheme had been so successful it was planned to launch another three in January next year.

"We will be looking at the suburbs of O'Connor and Campbell, with possibly a second area in Kambah," he said.

"From then on, three schemes a month will be launched for the rest of the year. That's 1800 houses a month, covering a total of 56,000 people in the first year."

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