

Newsletter

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Implementing Medical Fee Benchmarks

The Ministry of Health ("MOH") will be providing benchmarks for professional fees early next year. Although doctors will not be compelled to follow the recommendations and can set their own fees, the benchmarks can inform patients of how much they are expected to pay, help doctors to decide reasonable fees, and inform insurers of the reasonable reimbursement rates.

Fee benchmarks are not a new phenomenon; the Singapore Medical Association had introduced fee guides in 1987 and had expanded them to cover 1,500 procedures. However, in April 2007, they were told that the fee guides contravened the Competition Act as it was seen as doctors giving themselves an indication of what they should be charging.

As a result, these new fee benchmarks were one of the recommendations proposed in the Health Insurance Task Force last year. It is also one part of MOH's three-pronged strategy to ensure people continue to receive quality and sustainable healthcare.

Minister for Health Gan Kim Yong, has expressed his hope that this strategy will help to manage the increasing healthcare costs, which are expected to rise exponentially due to expensive medical treatments, better access to healthcare, and an ageing population.

This move is widely welcomed as it will enhance the transparency of medical costs in Singapore.

For more information, you can read the full articles [here](#).

Compulsory Use of the National Electronic Health Record

The National Electronic Health Record ("NEHR") was launched in 2011 as a national repository of medical information. The use of NEHR aimed to enable healthcare providers to provide more seamless treatment and to save money for patients.

However, private healthcare providers have been slow in adopting use of the NEHR. Despite the fact that a quarter of all private healthcare providers can access the NEHR and view patient records, only 3 per cent actually contribute to the scheme.

As a result, the MOH is looking to make it mandatory for all healthcare providers to upload data to the NEHR. This would mean that full details of a person's medical history will be reflected in this national electronic repository. Details such as a person's medical history, visits to doctors, chronic medication, allergies and vaccination records will be available in the NEHR.



To this end, the MOH will allow early adopters (i.e. those who contribute data by June 2019) to claim a one-off amount to offset the costs of upgrading their systems. MOH will also organise workshops to help doctors understand the new requirements and manage the electronic services.

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong noted that sharing of medical information is important as patients are increasingly visiting various healthcare professionals for multiple conditions. All healthcare providers must contribute to the NEHR to prevent gaps in a person's medical history.

For more information, you can read the full article [here](#).

Combatting Antimicrobial Resistance

An inter-ministerial committee called the One Health workgroup was launched in January 2017 to spearhead the national effort to combat antimicrobial resistance ("AMR").

AMR refers to the phenomenon where microbes are increasingly resistant to drugs due to overuse of medication like antibiotics. The implications of AMR are dire. If antibiotics are no longer effective, even simple infections could be fatal.

In November, Senior Minister of State for Health and Transport Lam Pin Min launched the group's National Strategic Action Plan on AMR. The plan aims to educate the public to minimise use of antibiotics. For example, the public will be taught that antibiotics do not work against viral infections (such as the flu) and simple steps like maintaining personal hygiene.

The plan also will see One Health agencies working with professionals and the industry. Industry players, such as farmers, manufacturers, distributors and pet owners, will be taught the proper use of antimicrobials, and the proper disposal of antimicrobial waste to prevent spread of resistance. Additionally, standardised data reporting of resistant drugs, surveillance of drug-resistant organisms in food, and maintaining high levels of hygiene will be encouraged. It is important to educate industry players too as resistance can develop along the food chain or through waste water containing traces of antibiotics.

Dr Lam also highlighted the importance of the integration of various national agencies, as well as international collaboration in our fight against AMR.

For more information, you can read the full articles [here](#) and [here](#).

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