



MH 70:40/10-13

MOH Circular No: 47/2018

13 November 2018

All Registered Medical Practitioners

Dear Doctors,

## **FEE BENCHMARKS FOR PROFESSIONAL FEES**

This circular informs doctors regarding the introduction of fee benchmarks for private sector professional fees covering common surgical procedures.

### **Introduction of Fee Benchmarks**

2. MOH has accepted in full the recommendations of the Fee Benchmarks Advisory Committee (FBAC) and published the recommended fee benchmarks for professional fees for common surgical procedures on the MOH website.

3. The introduction of fee benchmarks aims to provide stakeholders, including doctors, patients, providers and payers, a common reference for reasonable range of fees to aid in making better informed decisions. It is part of a larger strategy to keep healthcare costs sustainable. These benchmarks complement other measures such as the introduction of co-payment requirement for new Integrated Shield Plan riders.

### **Approach for the Fee Benchmarks**

4. The Committee has gone through a rigorous process in establishing the fee benchmarks:

- a. It studied data including actual 2017 transacted fees for surgical procedures incurred by Singapore Citizens on the Table of Surgical Procedures (TOSP) and considered other factors such as inflation.
- b. It sought input from technical experts such as specialists in the relevant fields regarding the complexity of the procedure, and the time, effort and expertise required of the professional for typical cases.
- c. It also consulted widely with key stakeholders, including private practice specialists, professional bodies (Academy of Medicine Singapore, Singapore Medical Association and the College of Family Physicians Singapore), providers, insurers, regulators, National Trades Union Congress and the Consumers Association of Singapore. The Committee took the feedback received in their deliberations to ensure that the



recommended fee benchmarks balanced the different interests and perspectives of the various stakeholders.

### Recommended Fee Benchmarks

5. The fee benchmarks are available for 222 surgical procedures on the TOSP. It is important to note the following points when looking at the fee benchmarks:

- a. The fee benchmarks are meant to provide stakeholders a common reference of reasonable fee ranges:
  - i. The fee benchmark for each procedure is a range of fees instead of a single figure, to provide for variation across cases.
  - ii. The upper bound of the benchmarks do not constitute a fee cap. Providers who charge outside these should be prepared to explain to patients, caregivers and payers the reasons why.
- b. The benchmarks are intended to cover routine and typical cases in the private sector, rather than exceptional cases where unusual circumstances or complexity may result in the fee not falling within a set of benchmarks.
- c. The fee benchmark for each procedure refers to the total professional fee for the particular procedure, including the fee for any necessary assistance. It does not refer to the professional fee per surgeon should a procedure commonly require assistance from another surgeon.
- d. The fee benchmarks are meant to cover cases in which only a single procedure is performed on the patient in the same sitting. When more than one procedure in the same sitting is required, the predominant considerations should be patient safety, operative efficiency and the quality of care. In general, if the procedures are performed through the same incision, the fees should be less than the sum of individual fee of each procedure.
- e. The fee benchmarks exclude Goods and Services Tax (GST) and anaesthetist fee.



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**How stakeholders could use the fee benchmarks**

6. To ensure that the benchmarks are effective and helpful to all stakeholders, the Committee made recommendations on how each stakeholder should use them.

Doctors

7. Doctors play an important role in the effective use of the benchmarks, and are strongly encouraged to do the following:

- a. Continue providing the best possible care in the patients' interests, maintaining good communication to support and facilitate patients' decision making, insofar as doctors are duty-bound to uphold the Singapore Medical Council's Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines on all matters concerning professional conduct.
- b. Satisfy themselves that their fees are fair, reasonable and appropriate for the services provided, with due consideration of the particular circumstances of the patient.
- c. Use the benchmarks as a reference when determining fair and appropriate fees and make reference to it when they advise patients on their charges.
- d. Explain to patients and other stakeholders (e.g. insurers and regulators) if their charges depart from the benchmarks.

Other stakeholders

8. Besides doctors, other stakeholders are also encouraged to use the benchmarks to make more informed decisions:

- a. Patients are encouraged to use the benchmarks as a reference for discussions with their doctors and to assist in making better informed decisions on care options.
- b. Payers such as insurers can refer to the benchmarks in their claims assessment, product design and selection of preferred healthcare providers for their panel to encourage prudent practices and improve the experience for patients.

9. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the fee benchmarks will depend on how well it is accepted and used by the various stakeholders. If there is concerted and collective effort in applying them, the fee benchmarks will help to moderate rising healthcare costs in Singapore, while ensuring that doctors are fairly remunerated.



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**Sustainable healthcare system**

10. MOH will continue to monitor trends in overall bill size and different fee components, as well as review the impact of the fee benchmarks. This will guide us in identifying additional areas in which new fee benchmarks could be developed and applied in future.

11. The publication of fee benchmarks is one of many steps that the MOH will take towards a sustainable and affordable healthcare system for current and future generations of Singaporeans. Our effort to build a sustainable healthcare system will require all stakeholders – including healthcare professionals and providers, patients and caregivers, payers and insurers, and government – to play a role. We urge doctors in both the public and private sectors to continue to provide good value care and charge reasonably to serve the best interest of all patients.

12. The press release can be found [here](#). The full report of the Fee Benchmarks Advisory Committee with the list of benchmarks can be found [here](#).

**Contact information**

13. For further clarification on this circular, please contact Ms Jayne Yap (jayne\_yap@moh.gov.sg).

14. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benjamin Ong'.

A/PROF BENJAMIN ONG  
DIRECTOR OF MEDICAL SERVICES