

Committee set up to recommend medical fee benchmarks



The first set of fee guidelines will cover procedures that account for 80 per cent to 85 per cent of operations at all hospitals here. The coverage will be gradually extended following this first release, and could eventually include benchmarks for consultation fees and laboratory tests. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

🕒 PUBLISHED JAN 22, 2018, 5:00 AM SGT

First set of guidelines for common medical procedures to be ready by second half of year

✉
Linette Lai Political Correspondent (<mailto:linettel@sph.com.sg>)

The Health Ministry has established a 13-member committee to come up with "reasonable" national benchmarks for medical fees.

The committee members include medical doctors, academics and representatives from the Government, as well as insurance and non-profit sectors.

The ministry had announced last November the plan to produce government-backed benchmarks as part of a move to keep healthcare costs in check.

Providing an update on the move yesterday, Senior Minister of State for Health Lam Pin Min announced the setting up of the committee and said that the first set of fee guidelines for common medical procedures will be ready by the second half of this year.

These procedures account for 80 per cent to 85 per cent of operations at all hospitals here.

The coverage will be gradually extended following this first release, and could eventually include benchmarks for consultation fees and laboratory tests, said Dr Lam.

"The committee members were selected based on their diversity of expertise," he said. "They will take reference from publication of total operation fees on the Health Ministry's website." Dr Lam was speaking on the sidelines of a scholarship awards ceremony in Sengkang.

Panel members

Dr Lim Yeap Teng (chairman) Senior consultant cardiologist in private practice; previously worked in the public healthcare sector for 24 years

Dr Ang Chong Lye Senior consultant ophthalmologist at the Singapore National Eye Centre
Mr Benedict Cheong Chief executive of non-profit organisation Temasek Foundation International

Dr Ho Kok Sun Council member of the Academy of Medicine Singapore

Mr Karthikeyan Krishnamurthy Vice-president of the National Trades Union Congress central committee

Dr Lam Kian Ming Chief executive of Mount Alvernia Hospital

Dr Lim Hui Ling Honorary assistant secretary for the College of Family Physicians Singapore

Ms Ngiam Siew Ying Deputy secretary (policy) at the Health Ministry

Dr Phua Kai Hong Health economist and faculty member at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

Dr Tan Boon Yeow Chief executive of St Luke's Hospital; also holds appointments in academia

Dr Toh Choon Lai Council member of the Singapore Medical Association

Mr Richard Wyber Chairman of the health insurance task force working group of the Life Insurance Association of Singapore

Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed Non-resident ambassador to Kuwait and the Foreign Minister's Special Envoy for the Middle East

Currently, the Health Ministry publishes on its website total operation fees for a variety of procedures. These help patients decide if their bills are considered large.

Said Dr Lam: "We would like to urge patients not to just look at the price, but to look at their needs as well."

He added that doctors who charge above the benchmark for a certain procedure should have a "strong justification" - for instance, if the operation is unusually long or complex.

The Singapore Medical Association used to publish fee benchmarks for doctors. However, these were withdrawn in 2007 as they were deemed anti-competitive.

The new guidelines will not run afoul of these laws because they are backed by the Health Ministry itself.

Doctors and members of the public had broadly welcomed the move when it was announced last year, even as some stressed the need for transparency during the process of establishing the guidelines.

The new committee will be chaired by Dr Lim Yean Teng, a cardiologist in private practice who had worked in the public sector for 24 years. "We hope our work will play a part in addressing the issue of rising healthcare costs, and keep costs sustainable," Dr Lim said.

Committee members will look at past transacted data and trends on fees to come up with their recommendations. They will also consult other experts if necessary.

The members plan to meet once a month to work out initial details, with the first meeting scheduled to occur one or two months from now.

Said one of the committee members, health economist Phua Kai Hong: "Healthcare is something where people expect the Government to intervene in terms of guaranteeing the quality and making it affordable."

Another committee member, Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed, said the team intends to take in a wide range of views when drafting the guidelines.

"This is a good opportunity to take a closer look at all the issues and understand the perspectives of the various stakeholders," said Mr Zainul, who is non-resident ambassador to Kuwait and the Foreign Minister's Special Envoy for the Middle East.

Unlock more articles at just \$0.99/month

Enjoy unlimited access to all stories. Subscribe at only \$0.99/month for the first 3 months*, no contract needed.

*Terms and conditions apply.

[Subscribe Now](#)

-
- › [Terms & Conditions](#)
 - › [Data Protection Policy](#)
 - › [Need help? Reach us here.](#)
 - › [Advertise with us](#)

SPH Digital News / Copyright © 2019 Singapore Press Holdings Ltd. Co. Regn. No. 198402868E. All rights reserved