

Doing Business Online

Patients embrace new technology in rural Queensland

An initiative of Medicare Australia aimed at streamlining the claiming process for medical benefits has been embraced by patients at Maleny in Queensland.

Maleny Medical Centre, the oldest and one of the busiest in the rural town, is one of about 4000 medical practices in Australia to have implemented online claiming.

The reason Medicare Australia's online claiming has been so popular in Maleny is that it provides a direct link between the health care provider and Medicare Australia allowing a patient to send their claim details instantly to Medicare via the internet, without setting foot inside a Medicare office.

Patients can even have their refund paid directly into their bank account, saving them the burden of having to forward a cheque from Medicare to their doctor.

80 per cent of patients are embracing online claiming

Practice manager at Maleny Medical Centre Clare Tuti said patients had enthusiastically received Medicare Australia's online claiming when it was introduced there two years ago.

'The patients just think it's marvellous,' Ms Tuti said.

'They think it's a great idea because they don't actually have to go anywhere or do anything. They just ask us to transmit their claim and everything's done for them.'

Ms Tuti said despite the uptake being slow in some practices, at Maleny people were extremely willing to trust the new, secure technology. She said about 80 per cent of patients had provided their bank account details and now received Medicare refunds directly. Of the remainder, most simply kept forgetting to bring in their details.

'The comments we get from the patients are that they just think it's a marvellous system and I can only agree with them. It's made our life so much easier.'

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Great for the practice's bottom line

'Since Medicare Australia's online claiming was introduced people have been happy to pay their accounts upfront because they can pay with a credit card and have the money back in their bank account before the credit card bill even comes in,' she said.

Not only was this convenient for the patients but also extremely good for the practice. Ms Tuti said whereas once they would have been chasing patients for payment, they now received most of their payments upfront and that was great for their bottom line.

'I don't know how we ever did what we did before because it's just fantastic and I think if you asked any of the patients they would all say that it's marvellous.'

Making the transition was easy for Maleny Medical Centre

Making the transition to online claiming was relatively easy for Maleny Medical Centre, especially since they had already upgraded to broadband.

It was simply a case of updating their software package with the Medicare Australia material and applying for the appropriate security certificates, which are used to maintain the integrity of data transferred between their office and Medicare Australia.

Ms Tuti said Medicare Australia's online claiming was much simpler and implementing it had been a very positive move.

She believed the practice was now more efficient and the time saved could be spent on other things.

She also acknowledged a reduction in errors and in the amount of time spent entering patient details at the time of consultation. This is because with Medicare Australia's online claiming, a patient's details are stored centrally and accessed immediately at the time of the claim.

In summing up Medicare Australia's online claiming, Ms Tuti said it was great and urged other practices to take full advantage of what it had to offer.

'They won't regret it,' she said.

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