

Doing business online

Rural practices lead the way with online claiming

Medical practices in rural Australia are leading the way in the uptake of new health sector technology that streamlines administration procedures and provides added convenience for patients.

In South Australia's Adelaide Hills, a group of four medical practices at Hahndorf, Mount Barker, Woodside and Nairne has recently joined the growing list of rural practices switching to Medicare Australia's online claiming.

Group practice manager Fay Briggs said she had decided to use Medicare Australia's online claiming when she realised the profound impact it could have on the practice and its patients

Using Medicare Australia's online claiming health care providers can now do business directly with Medicare Australia quickly and securely via the internet. This includes making bulk bill claims, processing private patient claims and updating information stored on the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register.

'I'd heard that online claiming could improve cash flow and it has proved that, it does help,' she said.

That's because Medicare Australia's online claiming allows practices to transmit claims every day.

These are promptly processed by Medicare Australia and paid directly into the practice's bank account, usually within two days.

Ms Briggs said the private patient claiming facility was also good because it removed the need for people to visit a Medicare office. At the time of consultation they simply chose whether or not to receive their rebate via cheque or have it deposited directly into their bank account.

'It makes it easier for people in the country if they can do everything at the one place,' she said.

'It's really just such a time saver and much more efficient.'

She said on the whole patients had accepted the new way of doing things.

'We're trying to encourage patients to get their payments through their bank account, it's quicker for them, and gradually they're changing over to it. I think they find it quite good. They can do it all in one visit and don't have to keep coming back.'

Ms Briggs said upgrading each practice's billing software to include online claiming was relatively easy and with help from her software vendor and Medicare Australia she was able to do most of the work herself.

Since moving to the new system, she said staff at each of the practices had been given an opportunity to expand their skills.

'Under the old system there were just certain people who were responsible for processing claims and that was their job. Now everyone is involved with the online claiming and that's really good for them because it gives them something new,' she said.

'It's really just such a time saver and much more efficient.'



Training the staff to use online claiming was also relatively easy.

'I made the changes slowly and staff always had a back-up person to help them through it and so I've found they have picked it up quickly and without too much trouble.'

She said the time saved using the online claiming was having a positive impact on the business.

'We can now batch and transmit bulk bills once a day instead of once a week which means we don't have to spend hours and hours processing claims,' she said.

And although the online system allows

practices to store and forward their private claims in a similar way to bulk bill claims, Ms Briggs said real time was the way to go.

'We didn't initially do that for private billing and every day we just set a time aside to do it, but I found that was doubling up a bit. The real time is quite quick so we found it more successful to transmit that way.'

Ms Briggs acknowledged that practices wanting to keep up with industry best practice would need to look at moving to online claiming.

'It's very good and I think that's the way things are going to go now,' she said.

***'We can now batch and transmit
bulk bills once a day instead of
once a week which means we don't
have to spend hours and hours
processing claims'***