

Doing business online

City GPs switch to internet-based services

In an environment of increased costs and demands on their time, general practices throughout Australia's metropolitan areas are switching to a new online claiming system that's making it faster and easier for them to do business.

Of the 4000 or so health care providers who have taken up Medicare Australia's online claiming since it was introduced in 2002, about 68 per cent are located in city areas.

At Dr S Punyanitya's practice in South Perth, practice manager Rachel Punyanitya was given the opportunity to implement online claiming early in 2005.

'We were encouraged to start online claiming by the people from Medicare Australia,' she said.

'We started using it about two months ago.'

Dr Punyanitya has both bulk bill and private patients and uses online claiming from Medicare Australia to lodge all of his claims.

The online system allows practices to transmit private patient claims in real time while they wait and to batch and transmit their own bulk bill claims at the end of each day.

In order to use online claiming Mrs Punyanitya said all she had to do was upgrade the office PC and go through a straightforward registration process.

Central to the success of online claiming is the use of PKI data encryption technology, which protects the data being sent and received. Practices must register for a digital certificate to allow them to use the system safely.

But other than having to complete a few forms, Mrs Punyanitya said making the move to online claiming was hassle free. She picked up the new software quickly and there were few procedural changes required.

'There were no problems at all,' she said.

During the change process, Mrs Punyanitya praised the help provided by Medicare Australia's eBusiness Service Centre. A business development officer assisted her by visiting the practice and helping her move over to online claiming.

Mrs Punyanitya said patients had accepted the use of internet-based claiming and appreciated the convenience it offered.

By claiming online from the doctor's office they no longer needed to make a separate trip to a Medicare office. They could pay their account in full and have their Medicare rebate sent to them by cheque or deposited into a nominated bank account.

The patient's details can even be stored by the practice to ensure the patient doesn't need their bank account number each time they visit.

'They love it because it gives them a choice,' Mrs Punyanitya said.

She said since changing to Medicare Australia's online claiming she had found billing a much simpler process.

'It's just so much easier to use,' she said.

It was quicker to process claims, and payments came back from Medicare Australia much sooner, which was good for the doctor's bottom line.

'He likes it because he gets his money back faster,' Mrs Punyanitya said.

'And it's more convenient for the patients of course.'

