

Doing business online

Fast, easy processing with Medicare Australia's online claiming says Queensland medical centre

Arch Medical Centre in rural Queensland saw Medicare Australia's online claiming as a way to save time and money when reintroducing bulk billing during 2004.

The small but busy rural practice, which services a number of Indigenous patients, had been considering online technology for some time before finally deciding to make the change.

In Maleny, Arch Medical Centre began the process of switching to Medicare Australia's online claiming by registering for the PKI digital security encryption certificates, which are central to the system's success, and also installing high speed broadband internet.

But the practice did not make the final transition until the Australian Government's additional bulk billing payments for seniors and concession card holders were introduced.

'When they introduced the extra bulk billing incentives for the doctors we decided to start bulk billing more patients again, so we thought it was about time we used Medicare Australia's online claiming,' practice manager Veronique Ponthieu said.

Setting the system up was relatively easy, as the practice had already done most of the planning and had tackled the technological barriers by keeping its computer and electronic systems current.

'The process of implementing the change has really happened in stages,' she said.

Training staff to use the new system was easy and Ms Ponthieu said everyone had taken to the change very well.

She said not only had Medicare Australia's online claiming made the processing of bulk billing claims faster, they had also reduced the workload for private patient claims and made sending details to the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register much more efficient.

'I find it's a lot better. It's not so stressful for the boss to be in the red or to have unpaid accounts, so that's a big plus for us.'

Before introducing Medicare Australia's online claiming, Arch Medical Centre assisted its patients by sending off their Medicare claims, despite having no obligation to do so. Now, Medicare Australia's online claiming makes that task quicker and cheaper by allowing staff to perform the task instantly online.

And because that service is available, more and more patients are enjoying the convenience.

'I would say that when we charge patients, probably 75 per cent opt to use Medicare Australia's online claiming. People are happy for us to offer this extra service and to make the process easier and more streamlined for them,' Ms Ponthieu said.



In terms of how Medicare Australia's online claiming has affected the business, Ms Ponthieu said she found the speedy payments for services rendered were a real advantage as they helped improve cash flow.

'I find it's a lot better. It's not so stressful for the boss to be in the red or to have unpaid accounts, so that's a big plus for us,' she said.

Ms Ponthieu said the real benefits for Arch Medical Centre were that the system reduced the staff's workload and generated far less paperwork. That's because under Medicare Australia's online claiming there's no need for the practice to send in written claims. Everything is processed electronically, on the spot.

'The most important benefit though is how quickly we get the money,' she said.

She also believes the introduction of Medicare Australia's online claiming had helped improve communication channels between Medicare Australia and medical practices.

Before Medicare Australia's online claiming and its helpdesk, she said being shunted from one person to another had often been frustrating.

Now, the helpdesk officers were always available, knowledgeable and prompt.

'I'm really happy with the way things are going,' she said, 'and glad that we made the change'.

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