

MBS Online Update

ISSUE 4

JULY 2009

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PLEASE NOTE:

The **July 2009 MBS** is available from the **MBS Online** downloads page in pdf, rtf and zip file formats.

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Subscribe to the MBS Online **Email Subscription Service** to receive the most up-to-date information on changes to the MBS. **See page 4** for more information.

Welcome to MBS Online Update

Welcome to the latest edition of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Online newsletter - **MBS Online Update**.

MBS Online Update aims to provide useful information about what is happening with the MBS and with MBS Online.

Current issues affecting the MBS, include:

The Federal Budget 2009/10 announced a number of changes which will impact on Medicare - these changes are outlined below

and in articles on page 3.

The latest version of the MBS - July 2009 - is now available to view or download from www.mbsonline.gov.au. Further information on the July 2009 changes is provided on page 4.

We are continually trying to improve MBS Online and we appreciate your suggestions on how this might be done. Page 5 provides a section on Providing Feedback to MBS Online and also some troubleshooting tips on using its existing functions to best

advantage.

We look forward to the MBS Online Update becoming a well established and valuable information tool for all interested parties including the medical profession, software developers, and health care consumers.

Previous editions of this newsletter are available from MBS Online and you can subscribe to receive an email notification when the next issue is available.

The MBS Online Team

Health Budget 2009/10

The following changes to Medicare were announced in the 2009/10 Federal Budget.

A Sustainable Medicare Safety Net

The Extended Medicare Safety Net (EMSN) will continue for all Australians and all services currently covered. The safety net thresholds have not been changed.

However, there is evidence that the EMSN has enabled some specialists to charge excessive fees.

The Government will take action to ensure EMSN funding is used to benefit patients and reduce their costs.

Further information on the EMSN is provided on page 3.

Modernising Medicare and Supporting Higher Quality Care

Advances in techniques and technology have resulted in a number of medical procedures being able to be performed much more quickly, safely and efficiently. However, this is not being reflected in how Medicare pays for these services.

The Government will adjust a number of Medicare fees to a more appropriate level so that there is a lower schedule fee for shorter and less complex common procedures, and a higher fee for complex, time intensive procedures.

The Government will also introduce changes to the *Better access to psychiatrists, psychologists*

and GPs Medicare items to improve care for patients.

Further information on the changes to *Better Access* items is provided on page 3.

MBS Review Framework

The Government is introducing new post-implementation reviews (at three years after introduction of the service) of new MBS items, to ensure that these services are clinically relevant and cost-effective in contemporary clinical use.

The Government will also be reviewing existing MBS items to ensure that they describe clinically relevant services, and that they are reimbursed to support cost-effective, evidence-based, best practice care.

Continued on page 2

Health Budget, continued

Continued from page 1 episodes.

The Department will be working with key stakeholders to develop these assessments and consultation processes and establish priorities for reviewing existing MBS items.

Increasing Competition in Pathology and Diagnostic Imaging

The Government will reduce regulation of pathology centres so that there is no limit on the number of Medicare-eligible collection centres a pathology provider can operate.

From 1 July 2010, all providers will be able to have as many collection centres as they choose, giving greater choice to patients and enhancing competition.

The Government will also improve patient choice by allowing patients to choose their pathology or diagnostic imaging provider for Medicare services.

Request forms for both pathology and diagnostic imaging services will be amended to inform patients that they can use the form to obtain Medicare-eligible services from any accredited provider.

Legislation will be changed to ensure that patients can choose a different pathology provider from the one selected by the doctor and still be eligible for a Medicare benefit.

More Support for Bulk Billing Pathology and Diagnostic Imaging Tests

New Bulk Billing Incentives

From 1 November 2009, the Government will introduce new bulk billing incentives for diagnostic imaging services and pathology

- The bulk billing incentive for out-of-hospital services for diagnostic imaging is an increased rebate of 10 per cent of the Medicare schedule fee; and
- For pathology, the bulk billing incentive will be between \$1.60 and \$4.00 an episode, depending on the type of test and where it is collected.

Pathology collection fees

The Government will adjust collection fees for certain types of pathology collections.

Pathology providers have benefited from increasing automation of pathology tests which have provided cost efficiencies and enabled providers to maintain high operating profit margins. The Government considers that it is reasonable for Australian taxpayers to also benefit from these efficiencies.

On average, the Medicare benefits per pathology episode, including both collection and test fees, will decrease from \$69.17 to \$66.26, a difference of \$2.91 per episode.

Modernising the MBS

At the request of pathologists, a number of other smaller changes have been made to Medicare fees for some anatomical pathology tests. These tests are required for the diagnosis of cancer, cannot be automated and require a high level of professional expertise to perform.

The Medicare rebate for these specific services will be increased by an average of \$53.27, ranging from \$16.70 to \$126.15. To fund these increases, the profession recommended the rebates for

some automated pathology tests will be decreased.

Improving the quality of services

The Government will establish a national diagnostic requesting service, run by the National Prescribing Service, to promote high quality and appropriate requests for tests from doctors.

To encourage diagnostic imaging services to upgrade ageing equipment, the Government will reduce from 1 July 2011 the Medicare fee for diagnostic imaging services provided on older, fully depreciated equipment.

Providing More Choice in Maternity Care – Access to MBS and PBS for Midwives

As part of the maternity reform package to improve choice and access to maternity services for pregnant women and new mothers, the Government will introduce legislation to allow appropriately qualified and experienced midwives to provide antenatal, birthing and postnatal services within collaborative models of care, including providing access to Medicare.

It is intended that the new Medicare items will be available for eligible midwives from November 2010.

Nurse Practitioners

The Government will support the nurse practitioner role by developing a long-term and sustainable model for nurse practitioners to provide services outside the acute care sector, including introducing legislation to allow nurse practitioners to provide an appropriate range of services that will be eligible under the MBS.

*MBS Online
has already proven
that it is
a useful tool.
The November
2008 Medicare
Benefits Schedule
PDF file
has been
downloaded from
MBS Online over
200,000 times
between
November 2008
and
May 2009.*

The Extended Medicare Safety Net

On 12 May 2009, the Government announced changes to the Extended Medicare Safety Net (EMSN) in the 2009-10 Federal Budget.

The EMSN provides an additional rebate for Australian families and singles who have out-of-pocket costs for Medicare eligible out-of-hospital services once an annual threshold in out-of-pocket costs has been met. Once the relevant annual threshold has been met, Medicare will pay for 80% of any future out-of-pocket costs for Medicare eligible out-of-hospital services for the remainder of the calendar year. However, as announced in the Budget, from 1 January 2010 there will be an upper limit or EMSN benefit cap on the amount of benefit that will be paid under the EMSN for some Medicare items.

This means that for those items, patients will still receive the standard Medicare rebate and once they reach the EMSN threshold, they will be eligible for an additional EMSN benefit of up to the amount of the EMSN benefit cap.

The items that will have an EMSN benefit cap are:

- All obstetrics services;
- Some pregnancy related ultrasounds;
- All Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) services;
- One type of varicose vein surgery (MBS item 32500);
- One type of cataract surgery (MBS item 42702);
- Injection of a therapeutic substance into an eye (MBS item 42740); and
- Hair transplantation for the treatment of hair loss as the result of disease or injury

(MBS item 45560).

From 1 January 2010 the Government will also be increasing the MBS schedule fees for 15 obstetric services at a cost of \$157.6 million over four years. For example, the MBS schedule fees for the items which provide for the management of labour and delivery will be increased by 30 per cent.

The changes made by the Government in the Budget ensure that all items currently covered by the safety net remain covered by the safety net and no items will be means tested for eligibility. Further details about the fee increase and the EMSN benefit caps, including an explanation of how EMSN benefit caps will work in practice, are available on the MBS Online website.

**MBS Online will work in partnership with all users
to enable easy access to quality MBS information online**

Better Access MBS items for GP's

The Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (Better Access) Initiative was introduced in November 2006 to improve treatment and management of mental illness within the community.

New measures aimed at improving the quality and delivery of Better Access services to those in need will apply from July 2009 and January 2010. These measures will affect MBS items used by general practitioners (GPs).

From **1 July 2009** the following changes will apply:

- The GP Mental Health Care Plan MBS items (2710 and 2712) will now be referred

to as GP Mental Health Treatment Plan (GP MHTP) items, to better reflect what they are intended to do

- GPs will be required to document diagnosis of a mental disorder in a MHTP (item 2710)

From **1 January 2010** the following change will apply:

- A new Medicare item will be introduced for a GP MHTP prepared by a GP who has not completed level one mental health skills training. The item description will be analogous to item 2710, with a reduced schedule fee

The existing GP MHTP item 2710 will retain its current schedule fee, reflecting the

additional expertise provided by those practitioners who have completed level one mental health training.

The introduction of the new MHTP item in January 2010 will give GPs time to participate in training and maintain their eligibility for item 2710.

It should be noted that those GPs who have not completed the training will still be able to refer patients to allied mental health professionals as per current arrangements, so that patients requiring these services will not be disadvantaged.

For more information on these changes please contact: mbsonline@health.gov.au

The
July 2009
MBS
can be
viewed
or
downloaded
from
MBS Online

July 2009 changes are now available

Category 1 – Attendances

Items 2517 and 2620 have been amended to bring their descriptors in line with the General Medical Services Table Regulations.

Items 2710 and 2712 have been altered to clarify language relating to GP mental health items.

Category 2 – Diagnostic Procedures and Investigations

Item 12533 has been amended with the restriction “not being a service to which item 66900 applies”.

Category 3 – Therapeutic Procedures

Perfusion services

Items 22055, 22065, 22070 and 22075 have been updated in line with Section 16(1) of the Health Insurance Act 1973. This is to reflect current clinical practice.

Lipectomy

Items 30168 and 30171 have been amended to better reflect the intent of lipectomy procedures.

Double Balloon Enteroscopy

Items 30684 and 30686 have been amended to improve the wording in the item descriptors.

Endoscopic or Endobronchial Ultrasound

Following recommendation from the Medical Services Advisory Committee, items 30696 and 30710 and the associated explanatory note have been introduced for the staging of lung cancers through endoscopic or endobronchial ultrasound.

Neurosurgery

Following a recommendation from the Medical Services Advisory Committee, items 40850 to 40862 have been amended to provide for deep brain stimulation for the movement disorders - essential tremor and dystonia. Item 40801 now excludes these conditions.

Breast Ptosis

Items 45557 and 45558 have been amended to better reflect the intent of breast ptosis procedures.

Category 5 – Diagnostic Imaging Services

New item 63476 has been introduced as a result of an

assessment by the Medical Services Advisory Committee and reflect clinical practice. Item 63476 is for the initial staging of rectal carcinoma by MRI.

Category 6 – Pathology

Tissue Pathology

The purpose of the changes is to increase fees for a small number of high complexity items which are currently under-remunerated. These items require a high level of professional input and the increase in fees reflects the costs associated with performing examinations on tissue samples and the reporting of these pathology tests. The increases would be offset by small fee reductions to a large number of more automated, high volume tests elsewhere in the table.

Pathology Item Descriptor Changes

A number of amendments to descriptors for other items are also proposed. These amendments would clarify the conditions for claiming these items.

MBS Online Latest News Page

The MBS Online Latest News page provides access to the most up-to-date information on issues affecting the MBS.

The Latest News articles cover a diverse range of topics, including:

- Changes to EMSN;
- Top 10 most popular MBS Create Publication reports
- Varicose Veins – Minor amendments to MBS and Health Regulations;
- Rebates for Capsule

- Endoscopy for Peutz-Jehgers Syndrome and Artificial Bowel Sphincter;
- Rebate for Breast MRI
- Slashing Red Tape and Boosting Prevention

These articles are available from the Latest News page. An archive has been created to store previous articles.

The Latest News page provides an opportunity to advise practitioners on issues that may

be causing concern.

Issues may have been raised by feedback to Medicare Australia, feedback to MBS online or emails sent to the MBS Online email box from concerned medical practitioners or allied health professionals.

You can arrange to have email notification of Latest News by subscribing to MBS Online's Email Subscription Service. Further information on this service is provided on page 5.

Hints and Tips for Using MBS Online

Email Subscription Service

Subscribing to MBS Online is simple and best of all - **it is free.**

Just follow these four simple steps:

1. Access the [MBS Online / Subscribe](#) webpage.
2. Enter your email address and press the 'Subscribe' button.
3. An advisory note will be displayed to indicate that your subscription request has been received.
4. A confirmation email will be sent to you outlining further instructions.

From this email simply complete the 'Confirm subscription to the MBS' form.

Create Publication

Create Publication is an easy-to-use component of MBS Online that allows the creation of dynamic real-time PDF documents.

Users can enter in the MBS items they are interested in and a PDF will be created.

The final PDF document will contain:

- Title Page;
- General Explanatory Notes - there is a checkbox that can be used to include or exclude the General Explanatory Notes;
- Relevant Explanatory Notes to the items selected; and
- the selected items.

This document is sent to the users preferred email address.

Downloading Documents

The easiest way to download a document is to right-click over the file and select 'save target as', then select where you would like to save the document.

When accessing large documents (over 500 KB in size), it is recommended that the following procedure be used:

- Click the link with the RIGHT mouse button
- Select "Save Target As" or "Save Link As" depending on your browser
- Select an appropriate folder on a local drive to place the downloaded file

MBS Online places the highest value on the quality, reliability and usefulness of the site. It aims to be user focused, easy to use and accurate

Searching MBS Online

Exact Phrase Selection

For example searching for the phrase – **endoscopic laser therapy**

For 'Exact Phrase Selection' the entry must be enclosed within quotes (single or double).

- Enter **"endoscopic laser therapy"** in the 'Search box'.
- Select the 'Search all' radio button.

This example will return hits for:- Items 30479 and 52035. Click on the relevant item to view information including the relevant explanatory note.

Wildcard (*)

The '*' wildcard can be used as a replacement for a group of letters within a search word. For example searching for – **Oesoph***

- Enter **oesoph*** in the 'Search box' (do not use quotes).
- Select the 'Search all' radio button.

Providing Feedback to MBS Online

The MBS Online team greatly appreciates the time taken by our users in providing website feedback. All feedback is important to the ongoing evolution of MBS Online and provides the direction MBS Online will head in the future.

Feedback can be submitted in two ways:

- Using the **Feedback** form which can be found on all pages in the left hand navigation tab
- By emailing your feedback to the **MBS Online Team** at www.mbsonline@health.gov.au

We aim to reply to all feedback where an email address is provided. This allows us to promptly help our users access the information they need by making them aware of some of the functionality provided by MBS Online which they may not otherwise been aware.

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