



From the AMA

# Easyclaim not so simple

## GPs face a larger burden than first thought if they take up government's new payment system.



**DR ROSANNA CAPOLINGUA**  
is president of the AMA.

**B**ACK in June, *Australian Doctor* reported the AMA as saying there would be no losers with the Federal Government's latest online claims system, Medicare Easyclaim. That thinking has been revised.

Please allow me to inform you of the AMA's new thinking on Easyclaim. In short, it is not an easy deal for doctors and patients.

For a start, Easyclaim won't be available from all banks. Currently, two banks have a product that does not integrate with practice software, and Tyro, which is not a bank, has a system that integrates with some practice software.

Receptionists will need to spend more time processing each patient. Even if it takes only one extra minute per

patient, this could be an extra three hours' work a day in a busy four-doctor practice. Processing Easyclaim transactions may well take more than a minute.

There will be additional keying-in, and almost certainly processing failures, and the system will take a long time to reach maximum efficiency. The current rate of rejected claims is 20%.

Patients will expect that they will be able to receive their Medicare rebate from the doctor's surgery at the point of service. We will be expected to deliver for the government and Medicare.

While the objectives of Easyclaim are worthy, and perhaps advantageous for the patient, the bottom line is that it will save the government huge amounts. The ability to save in the scaling

back of Medicare offices and processing of claims is substantial. However, the costs to doctors and their practices are real, and we will become the agents of Medicare and will assume its burden.

Despite all the question marks, the government is planning to go ahead with a multi-million-dollar advertising blitz to launch Easyclaim in the next few months.

Meanwhile, the AMA is in deep discussion with Human Services Minister Senator Chris Ellison over our many concerns.

Our argument is potent, and hopefully persuasive.

Easyclaim is all about shifting a mountain of work from Medicare offices to doctors' surgeries. Doctors providing care to patients via a

Medicare-rebatable service will be asked to be Medicare agents.

If we privately bill, the patient will pay the account by cash, credit card or cheque. This is processed as per usual.

The patient will then be able to ask for their Medicare rebate on the spot. They will produce their Medicare card, which will be swiped. Keying of provider number, item number and other information will then occur, and the patient's eligibility status/concession status confirmed.

The patient then produces a debit account card, and we will swipe again for the rebate to be paid directly into the patient's account. In some situations, a third swipe may be required. For many GPs, it will be a case of three swipes and 'you're out', because there may be confusion on the patient's behalf, rejection of a claim and much angst between patient and front desk while all the usual business of trying to run a practice occurs.

If Medicare Australia was shifting this work to another government department, the shift would be accompanied by an appropriate budget transfer to the new depart-

ment to cover costs. I fail to understand why we are expected to take on Easyclaim without a similar shift to underpin our costs.

Pharmacists are getting paid to take on the electronic component of script dispens-

ing at about 40¢ an item on each script.

The banks and financial institutions will make huge profits from Easyclaim — every swipe of a card will set the cash registers ringing.

Doctors, too, are entitled to be paid for doing Medicare Australia's work. Every medical practice will need to make a huge time and resource commitment to make Easyclaim work for their patients.

As it stands, though, the system is not attractive for doctors — it will cost money and it will cost valuable patient and practice time. The banks and the pharmacists will be winners, no doubt.

My message to the government is simple: without the support of doctors Easyclaim faces a very hard road. The burden that the government puts on doctors may well be transferred onto patients.

The government needs to reconsider carefully. ●

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