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Easyclaim too hard for doctors

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There were 76 million patient-claimed Medicare rebates in the year ending June 30, representing the total potential market for the reverse Eftpos Easyclaim system.

However, most of these rebates are still being paid in cash at Medicare offices while a slowly growing number are being paid online.

As at October 2009, Medicare says 2763 practices had signed up to EasyClaim, while 4795 had signed up to Medicare Online.

Online claiming involves the practice sending the patient's claim directly to Medicare electronically. Medicare then credits the patient's bank account within three working days, if the account details have been provided.

About 2.5 million of Medicare's 12.7 million card holders have supplied bank account details. Medicare is ramping up efforts to convince patients to hand over account numbers and BSBs. Medicare is also asking patients to pressure doctors to sign up to electronic claiming.

"I encourage patients to ask their medical practice if they offer electronic claiming and how they can use it," Medicare Australia Chief Executive Officer Lynelle Briggs said in a media statement two weeks ago.

GP and Vice President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Steve Hambleton, says the online system is much easier for general practices than Easyclaim.

"Some GPs who have introduced Easyclaim tell me that they are now having a queue of people waiting to go home," said Dr Hambleton.

"Easyclaim just takes so long and takes up busy staff time. Doctors take on Easyclaim as a service for their patients but in most cases it is not fully integrated into the practice management software, so it is another set of processes that have to be completed before the patient can leave.

"I mean it works and it is good for the patient but it takes a lot of staff time and that is the issue.

"The incentive payment of 18 cents per transaction is being pulled now as well," said Hambleton yesterday.

"Every single claim that is put through at the surgery is one less patient rocking up to a Medicare office and that is a huge cost saving for the government. Yet they are loading these costs onto general practitioners.

"Now is not the time to pull the 18 cent subsidy, in fact it should be increased to at least the 40 cents that pharmacies get for processing scripts."

Medicare's Transitional Support Package of up to \$1000 cash for doctors who adopt electronic claiming ends on December 31, as does the 18 cent per transaction incentive payment.

Yet the majority of surgeries are yet to sign up to the system and seem unlikely to do so.

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