

Informed Financial Consent for Diagnostic Imaging Patients

In response to Health Minister Tony Abbott's call for measurable improvements in informed financial consent (IFC) for inpatient diagnostic imaging services, the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) has established a website to help patients fully understand the extent of potential out-of-pocket expenses relating to imaging services they may incur during their stay in hospital.

The website will be launched by Mr Abbott's representative, Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, this afternoon at 4 pm at the St George Private Hospital.

The website, developed with the support of the Australian Medical Association, means patients will have greater certainty of their out-of-pocket expenses.

More than 200 hospitals have been included on this website and patients will be able to search by hospital, and then by practice, to obtain information about the cost of in-patient imaging services.

For those unable to access the website, they will be able to access the information by a 1800 telephone number.

Patients and doctors will be informed about the website and the supporting 1800 telephone number through brochures and information cards that will be distributed to hospital admission staff and treating doctors, with the aim of encouraging the doctors to obtain financial consent from patients, prior to their admission to hospital.

According to the President of the ADIA, Dr Ron Shnier, there are practical difficulties in ensuring patients can give informed financial consent for diagnostic imaging services in hospital.

Medical specialists and other doctors involved in the patient's care order the services for their patients and these can relate to pre-operative assessment, images in the operating theatre, post-operative imaging to check on outcomes, or to help in the management of unforeseeable complications.

Radiologists and practices are most often unaware of these requests until the patient attends the imaging department.

"Diagnostic imaging practices and radiologists must, however, do all they can to inform hospital in-patients of potential out of pocket expenses associated with their diagnostic imaging examinations.

"The full cost of providing imaging services is not covered by government rebates.

"Only 75% of the Medicare fee is paid for in-patient services. In most circumstances, the patient's private health fund will pay the difference up to 100%, and in some cases, to a higher level.

"In other cases, there will be out-of-pocket expenses, for which the patient will be responsible.

"This service is designed to give patients information about the out-of-pocket charges they are likely to be liable for, before they are admitted to hospital," he said.

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