



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

COMMUNIQUE

Monday 13 February 2012

Re: Specialist Practice Incentive Payments

Executive Summary

E-health continues to be a significant element in the government's health agenda. For e-health to be successful, all medical practitioners throughout Australia will need to adopt e-health technologies. The existing Practice Incentive Payment (PIP), which is available to a practice that is accredited, or working towards accreditation, for the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' (RACGP) *Standards for General Practices*, has led to the widespread adoption of e-health technologies by general practitioners.

To achieve this level of adoption among specialists, a Specialist Practice Incentive Payment (SPIP) will be necessary to enable specialists to implement advances in e-health, and ultimately deliver better and streamlined patient outcomes.

Recommendations

e-Health continues to be a significant element in the government's health agenda. The creation and maintenance of the National e-Health Transition Authority (NeHTA), passage of the universal health care identifier legislation, proposed specialist on-line consultation incentives, progress on standards in e-health (e-referrals, digital diagnostic imaging, e-discharge, e-medication) and the consideration of a personally controlled electronic health record (PCEHR) represent a major renewal. The signatories of this communiqué remain positively engaged with the e-health agenda through representation on NeHTA committees but propose the following initiative to hasten adoption of e-health enabling technologies.

A successful adoption of beneficial e-health practice will not be achieved through government action alone. All Medical practitioners throughout Australia will need to adopt e-health technologies for all the benefits of e-health to be realised. Currently, the existing Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) is only available to a practice that is accredited, or working towards accreditation, for the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' (RACGP) *Standards for General Practices*. The e-health incentive recognises the prospective advance of e-health technology.

As technology continues to develop, practices can securely exchange information such as discharge summaries, pathology and specialist reports, send electronic referrals and pathology orders and prescribing electronically. Patient information sent and received electronically will be able to be added directly into a patient's electronic health record.¹

The proposed e-health activities described – the exchange of discharge summaries, pathology and specialist reports and the uploading of patient information into a PCEHR – will involve all specialists. The link between general practitioners (GPs) and specialists is critical.

Clearly the aim will be the adoption by specialists of e-health technologies based on agreed Australian standards, facilitated by appropriate incentive arrangements to enable implementation of e-health.

While there is evidence that computers are being used by specialist practices for information management purposes, such as retrieving information, the adoption of clinical functions such as electronic prescribing and medical records has been generally poor² in contrast to the situation in general practice. The recent computerisation of general clinical practice can be attributed to the PIP IM/IT Incentive, which ceased in August 2009. GPs have received considerable funding for:

- the training and development of GPs, practice managers, nursing staff and coordinators;
- the identification and audit of appropriate patient record software;
- the purchase of related equipment and software;

- an eight – ten year transition period to move to electronic medical records, script writing and recall systems, and in some cases, to totally electronic practices;
- assistance with the accreditation of clinics through the practice manager including training (funded as a separate activity not linked to computerisation of clinics); and
- the provision of assistance by RACGP to support practice managers and GPs in achieving accreditation.

While Specialists will need similar practice incentive payments to those offered to GPs over a comparable period of time in order to achieve the same level of utilisation of e-health technologies, they will also need the same advice and support that was extended to GP's.

If this were to happen, there should be more uniformity and transferability of patient records, increased potential for de-identified research, increased efficiency in the system and faster resolution of patient issues system wide.

The challenge is therefore to see greater use of computers in specialist clinical practice. The incentive program with appropriate support that proved successful for improved clinical use of computers in general practice must now be applied to specialist practice.

The signatories of this communiqué call on the Australian Government to introduce a Specialist Practice Incentive Payment (SPIP) with levels of commitment and support similar to general practice incentive payments to enable specialists to implement advances in e-health, and ultimately deliver better and streamlined patient outcomes.

Signed

MR IAN CIVIL

PROF. JOHN KOLBE




**PRESIDENT
ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS**

**PRESIDENT
THE ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF
PHYSICIANS**

1. Medicare Australia at <http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/provider/incentives/pip/index.jsp>.
2. Osborn M, Day R and Westbrook J, "Are specialist physicians missing out on the e-Health boat?" Int Med J 2009;39(10):655-61.

APPENDIX

About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS): The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, established in 1927, is a not-for-profit organisation training surgeons and maintaining surgical standards in Australia and New Zealand. Approximately 95 per cent of all surgeons practising in Australia and New Zealand are Fellows of the College (FRACS). The College commits to ensuring the highest standard of safe and comprehensive surgical care for the community it serves through excellence in surgical education, training, professional development and support.

About the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 13,500 physicians – often referred to as medical specialists – and 5,000 trainees, across Australia and New Zealand. The College represents more than 25 medical specialties including paediatrics & child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology and public health medicine, occupational & environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. www.racp.edu.au

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