

Private hospitals share more bill data

Patients can now compare costs of treating 40 conditions

BY JEREMY AU YONG

PATIENTS can now compare prices between private and public hospitals on treatments for a wider range of common medical conditions.

On Saturday, the Ministry of Health (MOH) updated its list of hospital bill sizes to include data from private hospitals for around 40 common medical conditions.

Previously, private hospitals – save for Mount Alvernia Hospital which complied fully – submitted bill sizes for only 10 out of the 70 common medical conditions tracked by the ministry.

Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan, writing in his blog yesterday, hailed the move as a “major achievement in our drive to promote bill size transparency”.

He added that it took much cajoling to get the private hospitals on board.

“With persuasion and hand-holding over the past year, all private hospitals are now able to comply, though to slightly different degrees of comprehensiveness. But over time, data quality will improve,” he wrote.

Comparisons between private and pub-

lic hospitals cannot be made across all 70 conditions at the moment because some hospitals do not treat enough of those patients.

Mr Khaw explained that to ensure the data is comparable, MOH publishes data for a particular hospital only if it treated more than 30 patients with that medical condition in a year.

This left about 40 medical conditions with enough patients in private hospitals to yield comparisons.

The procedures for which there is now new bill data include haemorrhoid surgery, appendix surgery, gall bladder removal surgery and heart angioplasty.

Not surprisingly, treatments in private hospitals were generally costlier than those in public ones.

There were, however, some rare exceptions. Mount Alvernia Hospital charged the least to treat diabetic eye disease.

The median unsubsidised bill size was \$1,118.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the next cheapest, had a median bill size of \$1,273.

Mr Khaw advised patients to use the list to shop around for elective surgery. He also hoped hospitals would use it to reflect on how they could do better than their peers.

“This, I see as the greatest value of bill size transparency,” he wrote.

MOH began publishing bill size data for the top 70 medical conditions in

CLEARER PICTURE

Bill sizes for two procedures with a high volume of private hospital cases

HAEMORRHOID SURGERY

Hospitals (Ward A)	Average length of stay (days)	50th percentile bill size (\$)	90th percentile bill size (\$)
National University Hospital	1.6	2,714	5,464
Singapore General Hospital	3.3	3,151	7,082
Tan Tock Seng Hospital	1.3	1,586	2,867
Private hospitals (single bed)			
Mount Alvernia Hospital	1.6	5,106	7,938
Mount Elizabeth Hospital	1.3	6,880	10,101
Raffles Hospital	1.5	7,812	9,917

DELIVERY (CAESAREAN SECTION) WITH SEVERE COMPLICATIONS

Hospitals (Ward A)	Average length of stay (days)	50th percentile bill size (\$)	90th percentile bill size (\$)
KK Women's and Children's Hospital	3.4	5,827	7,448
National University Hospital	3.7	6,196	8,175
Singapore General Hospital	3.9	6,181	7,748
Private hospitals (single bed)			
Gleneagles Hospital	3.6	9,450	14,589
Mount Alvernia Hospital	4.5	7,035	10,343
Mount Elizabeth Hospital	4.5	10,832	15,978
Thomson Medical Centre	4.0	6,976	10,411

Source: MINISTRY OF HEALTH



VALUE OF TRANSPARENCY

“Patients should shop around for their elective surgery. And hospitals should also reflect on how they could do better than their peers. This, I see as the greatest value of bill size transparency.”

Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan in his blog entry yesterday

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2003.

The data, updated monthly, is available online at <http://www.moh.gov.sg/mohcorp/billsize.aspx?id=302>

The online database was well received by the public as it enabled price comparisons.

In 2004, a price war among hospitals resulted in a more than \$1,000 drop in the cost of Lasik, the surgical treatment for short-sightedness.

Yesterday, private hospitals told The Straits Times they supported the Government's move and had done their best to comply.

A spokesman for Parkway Holdings, which runs the Mount Elizabeth, Gleneagles and Parkway East hospitals, said the group had hired extra staff to help carry out the initiative.

The group has over 1,000 accredited specialists who run private practices with patients commonly paying their bills directly.

“Over the past few months, we have been working very closely with our specialists to ensure that bill sizes of diseases are accurately tabulated,” said the spokesman.

Both Parkway and Raffles Hospital said that the list was unlikely to have any immediate impact on bills.

Raffles Hospital said it did not expect any price adjustments specifically in response to the new list, while Parkway said that any price change will be made only after careful consideration.

And while members of the public yesterday welcomed the inclusion of more bill data from private hospitals, some said price remains a secondary consideration.

Ms Wendy Tan, 30, who is seven months pregnant, said that the list would probably not influence her choice of doctor.

“I've already decided on my gynaecologist and I don't think I would change,” said the pharmacist.

“For surgery, I think doctors are the most important thing. Only if it's a very minor procedure would price become a factor.”

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