



MINISTRY OF HEALTH
SINGAPORE

The Electronic
HealthScope

Public consultation – for transparency, understanding and support

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Getting stakeholders to provide feedback is a crucial step when it comes to policy-making.

Dialogue Session with Minister for Health Mr Khaw Boon Wan on Enhancing MediShield Payout 17 April 2008



All about public consultations

Public consultations are an opportune time for members of the public to understand the intent of proposed policies as well as for policy-makers to appreciate the issues that the public faces.

Consultation improves the policy-making process, making it more transparent while allowing stakeholders to bring attention to issues the government may have overlooked. At the same time, consultation provides an avenue to explain and garner support for the newly proposed policies.

Public consultations have played a large part in the way the Singapore Government makes its policies and legislation especially with regard to healthcare issues as these are always close to people's hearts.

Most recently, the Health Ministry has been busy with dialogue sessions on MediShield reform, which has just ended in April and the proposed regulatory regime for liposuction, which has just started.

i) MediShield Reform

MediShield is an affordable insurance scheme for large medical bills in Class B2 and C wards. It works hand-in-hand with Medisave to help pay for larger hospitalisation bills while in most cases, Medisave is sufficient to cover small bills.

At present, basic MediShield covers about 60 per cent of the large Class B2 and C hospital bills, with patients paying the rest. Despite being heavily subsidised by the Government, some patients may still find the amount taxing on their finances. Thus, the Ministry is working towards increasing MediShield coverage to 80 per cent of large hospital bills for B2 and C wards to lower the financial load on patients.

Specifically, MOH proposed to substantially improve the following MediShield limits to achieve this objective:

Daily claim limits

- Increase daily claim limits for normal wards from \$250 to \$450;
- Increase daily claim limits for ICU wards from \$500 to \$900;
- Increase the claim limits of some surgical procedures; and
- Increase the claim limits for surgical implants and approved medical consumables from \$2,500 to \$7000.
- Increase claim limits for outpatient benefits such as chemotherapy for cancer. For a per 7-day treatment cycle, the amount would be revised from 150 to \$270 and for a per 21 or 28 day treatment cycle, the amount would be revised from \$700 to \$1,240.
- Increase claim limits for outpatient benefits for stereotactic radiotherapy for cancer from \$1,000 to \$1,800.

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Age	2008 Medisave Top-up	Age	Premium Adjustment
51-60	+\$150	50 years and below (63% of policyholders)	Increase < \$3 per month
61-70	+\$250	51 to 60 years (20% of policyholders)	Increase < \$5 per month
71-75	+\$350	61 to 80 years (16% of policyholders)	Increase < \$10 per month
76-80	+\$450		
81 and above	+\$550 (new increase)		

The above substantial increases in benefits and payouts will require some modest adjustments in the MediShield premiums for those 80 and below. For policyholders aged 81 and above, the challenge was to keep premiums low because of the small risk pool and the higher tendency to be hospitalised with large claims. Hence, to lessen the burden, a higher deductible will be applied to those aged 81 to 85, from the current \$1,500 to \$3,000 for Class B2 and \$1,000 to \$2,000 for Class C. This would help keep premium adjustments for this age group to between \$30 to \$40 a month.

Singaporeans can use their Medisave to pay for MediShield premiums for themselves and their dependents. For all policyholders, the annual MediShield withdrawal limit is \$800. This will be raised to \$1,150 for policyholders above 80 years old from 1 December 2008.

Finally, to aid in the proposed increase in premiums, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) will top up Medisave accounts for those aged 50 and above in September 2008. Singaporeans between the aged of 51 to 60 will receive \$150; 61 to 70 will receive \$250; 71 to 75 will receive \$350 and 76 to 80 will receive \$450. To meet the larger premium increase for those aged 81 and above, the MOF will increase payouts by an additional \$100, from \$450 to \$550.

ii) Liposuction regulatory regime

The MOH has prepared a draft regulatory framework pertaining to liposuction, an elective surgery with recognised risks. Liposuction will be regulated as a special care service under the Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act (PHMCA). Clinics offering liposuction must obtain prior approval from the Ministry and comply with two specific licensing conditions – premises and practice. Doctors who do not comply with the licensing conditions may be deemed as contravening the law and could risk having their license revoked.

The Ministry is gathering feedback and views on the proposed regulatory regime based on the following areas as stated below and will use views gathered to determine the final licensing conditions. The public can provide their feedback at moh_info@moh.gov.sg or send their comments to the Ministry. MOH will first work to formulate regulations for liposuction, and will decide later if more procedures should be regulated.

• *Premise*

The premises in which liposuction procedures are performed depend on the volume of supernatant fat removed.

Liposuction procedures that remove less than 1 litre of supernatant fat in healthy patients and performed under local anaesthesia may be permitted in appropriately equipped surgical facilities of approved medical clinics. The practitioner would at a minimum require the assistance of a registered nurse.

For procedures involving more than 1 litre of supernatant fat, the use of general anaesthesia or patients with medical conditions, the procedure can only be performed in an ambulatory surgery centre or hospital.

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- *Practice*

- *Credentials/training*

In general, only doctors who have undergone at least 1 year of surgical training following housemanship may practise liposuction. Also, doctors must have attended liposuction -specific education and training, observed and performed a minimum number of liposuction procedures preceptorship.

Training applications may vary depending on the total experience of the doctor and the type of liposuction performed. Less invasive procedures such as lipoaspiration, where the volume of fat aspirated is less than 100ml, a period of six months of surgical training, relevant procedure-specific training, or both, may suffice.

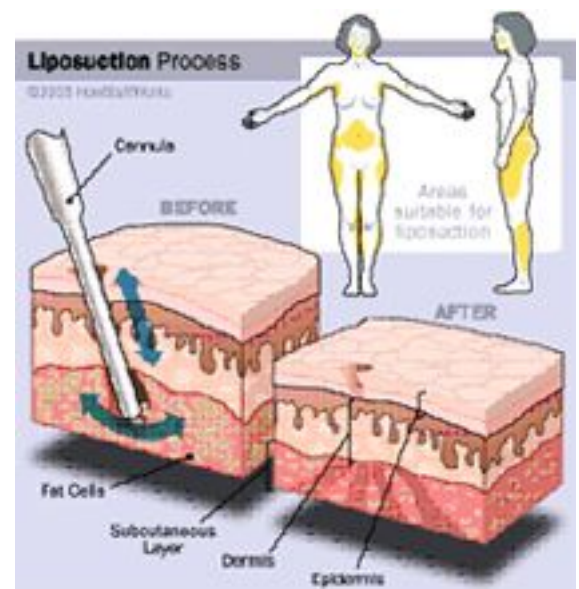
At the same time, all practitioners must also be certified and be current in basic resuscitation skills, namely Basic Cardiac Life Support. Practitioners with previous experience in liposuction who wish to continue to perform liposuction in their clinic will have their performance records reviewed. Hospitals and ambulatory surgery centres will need to have credentialing systems in place to accredit their doctors who perform liposuction.

- *Patient safety*

The doctor must have properly evaluated and counselled the patient on the costs, risks and outcomes of the procedure. Before the procedure, written informed consent must be obtained from the patient. In view that liposuction is a cosmetic surgery and not a procedure to treat a life-threatening disease, the MOH is proposing to make it mandatory for patients, prior to the procedure, to be given a minimum 15-day period to consider the procedure and risks. The time period may be waived for patients who have travelled from overseas for the procedure. In any case, the doctor will need to document the evaluation and counselling process in detail.

- *Quality assurance*

The doctor must perform the procedure under a quality assurance framework. The doctor must keep proper medical patient records and document his patients' outcomes and satisfaction and any adverse events arising from liposuction. Also, he should participate regularly in peer review and practice improvement programmes. The MOH will audit the quality assurance programmes to assess the safety and quality of the liposuction services provided, which ascertains the renewal of licences for these services.



Feedback

We hope you have enjoyed the article. If you have any comments or queries on this article, please contact us at: moh_healthscope@moh.gov.sg

A Salute to our healthcare officers and professionals

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The Minister for Health Awards 2008

The Minister for Health Awards recognizes officers for carrying out projects or operations in an outstanding manner and for demonstrating leadership, efficiency, professionalism and teamwork. These awardees have significantly enhanced public confidence in our healthcare system, and made Singaporeans feel proud of our healthcare workers and healthcare system. On 8 April 2008, 57 awards were presented to public officers and community members for the outstanding contributions in handling of Chikungunya outbreak and the illegal product Power1 Walnut. Officers from various agencies including MOH, NEA, HSA, NUH, CDC and the private sector were commended for their work.



In his speech, "Protecting Singaporeans is Everyone's Job", Minister for Health Khaw Boon Wan highlighted three common qualities - Alertness and Action; Teamwork and Collaboration; and Professionalism and Dedication - that were displayed in both the Chikungunya and Power 1 cases. Minister Khaw also cautioned that "our job is never done", as other infectious diseases will always try to "sneak" into Singapore and there will be other fake drugs on the black market. He called on Singaporeans to remain on their guard and help lighten the load of the healthcare officers. Lastly, he commended the award recipients thus: "We are proud of all of you. Your good work has allowed us to sleep better."

PS21 Star Service Awardees

The Public Service in Singapore plays a key role in the lives of Singaporeans. Through the work that it does, the Public Service provides infrastructure, homes, education, law and order and defence, and creates the right environment for Singaporeans to earn a good living, raise a family and lead a fulfilling life. The key to developing a first class Public Service lies in inculcating core values of Integrity, Service and Excellence in the civil service. The process calls for commitment and a desire to want Singapore to succeed; every one striving for continuous improvement and excellence in our work and service to the people.

The PS21 Star Service Award recognizes public service officers for quality service. Since 2003, it has been given out annually to public service officers who are nominated by their organizations for service excellence. This year's ceremony will also serve to kick-off Public Service Week.

Each Ministry nominates up to 5 officers to receive the Star Service Award. From the nominations, the top performing nominees for the Distinguished Star Service Award will be selected. The Distinguished Star Service Awardees is chosen by an independent judging panel composed of selected members of the GEMs committee.

We congratulate MOH award winners and also hear from them on their thoughts on providing excellent service.

A Salute to our healthcare officers and professionals



Distinguished Star Service Awardee

"To serve people, especially our patients by meeting their needs and providing the best outcome and experience, is the yardstick of service excellence in healthcare. Place yourself in the shoes of these patients and think of the service you would expect. Service should be given consistently and sincerely from the bottom of the heart to all patients and not only to selected people."

**Miss Janet Khoo Beng Neo O&G Centre
Singapore General Hospital**

PS 21 Star Service Awardees

"What does service mean to me? Meeting expectations! For me, this means making the correct diagnosis, offering the correct management and communicating all of this clearly and effectively! Two things also contributed to achieving excellent service, firstly, a supportive family that has to put up with my long and irregular hours at work, and secondly, a motivated team of colleagues at work who share a common belief and goal. There is no limit to how much you can help your patients or customers. The only limitation is that thought or belief in your mind! My advice to others: be sincere and give your best always. Most importantly, enjoy what you do!"

**Dr Kevin Lim Boon Leong,
KK Women's and Children's Hospital**



"For me Service comes in the form of 3 'S' - being Sincere, Spontaneous, and carrying a Smile. Service comes from the heart. I believe in treating others the way I want others to treat me."

**Dr. Angelia Chua
Yishun Polyclinic
National Healthcare Group Polyclinics**

A Salute to our healthcare officers and professionals

"I am very honoured and happy to be given this award. But I do know that there are a lot of capable and dedicated people in the Ministry of Health who work very hard and I think they deserve this award just as much, if not more than I do. I would like to share this award with everyone."

**Dr. Tan Hak Koon, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology
Singapore General Hospital**



"Customer service can start with as simple an act as the introduction and clarification of our roles when approaching patients, especially for the first time. Yet this is easily forgotten in the hustle and bustle of our daily work. Developing good patient communication skills and constantly improving our clinical skills are also vital in ensuring that we continue to deliver excellent patient care. In addition, a readiness to serve, approachability and patience will impress on patients and their family members our sincerity in caring for them. Even in healthcare, where patient care, safety and outcomes are top priority, patient satisfaction is important. We should always strive to meet patients' expectations and find creative ways to overcome any obstacles in communicating with them. With regular assessments and re-assessments of our abilities and shortcomings, we will be able to continuously progress

and improve. The award is the result of a concerted team effort from the various clinical departments and wards in NUH, including the University Digestive Centre and the Endoscopy Centre, where I work. Teamwork is truly essential in facilitating the delivery of excellent customer care. It is a great privilege to receive this award, which I would like to share with all colleagues in my department."

**Dr. Low How Cheng, University Digestive Centre and the Endoscopy Centre
National University Hospital**

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Fitted for the job

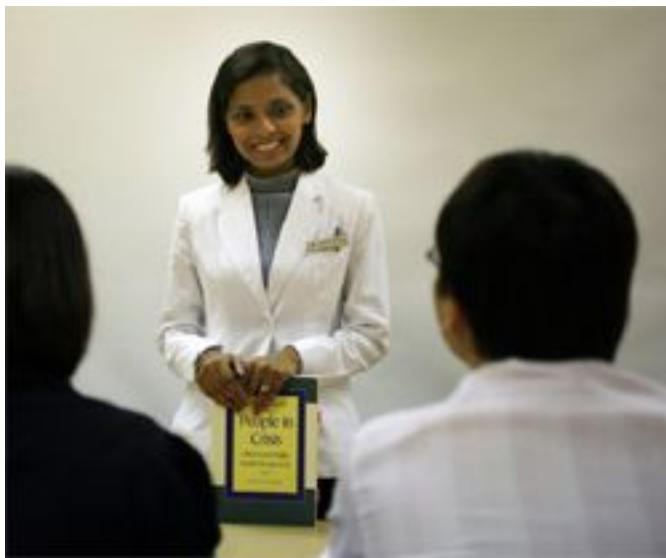
Fitted For The Job

SingHealth and Central Singapore CDC join hands to remove barriers to employment for patients with chronic diseases.

Being sick does not always mean being unfit for work. This is the message of the partnership between SingHealth and the Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) as it strives to enhance employability of patients with chronic diseases.

The Central Singapore CDC employment programme strives to bridge job seekers with potential employees in the food and beverage, security, service and logistics sectors. Since the programme began last year, the Central Singapore CDC has helped more than 2,500 job seekers.

SingHealth is hoping to extend the programme to patients with chronic diseases. Medical Social Workers (MSWs) would refer patients who are seeking employment to the Central Singapore CDC, which will then assist to job-match them with potential employers.



SingHealth, along with SingHealth Centre for Health Services Research (SCHSR), the MSWs from SingHealth's institutions – Singapore General Hospital (SGH), National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCC), National Heart Centre Singapore (NHC) and Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) – conducted a pilot study on the obstacles faced by 300 of their chronically ill patients when seeking employment. The survey respondents are Medifund recipients, who needed assistance with employment, referral to community resources and counseling.

Key findings of study

Unemployment, chronic medical issues and financial issues are a series of problems faced by patients. The study found that 84% wanted to work and amongst these, more than 90% cited medical benefits and financial reasons for the desire to work. Of the respondents, 46% preferred part-time work. About more than half have modest salary expectations of about \$500 to \$999 per month. At the same time, patients preferred flexible job schedules and that employers would accommodate their special needs – 'time for treatment' (92%) and to be 'excused from physically taxing tasks' (81%).

Further to that, the study found that a disproportionate number of patients were dismissed from their jobs (12.2% versus 1.9% from General Health Survey 2005).

It was also found that more than half of patients relied on savings and income of family members, especially their spouse, to get by. Eighty per cent did housework while 15% look after children or relatives at home.

Last, for the respondents of the study, they are already socially and educationally disadvantaged even before the onset of the illness. And their situations were made worse by the onset of disease.

Fitted for the job

More about the programme

The survey results prompted SingHealth to embark on some measures. MSWs held a forum in February to educate employers on common chronic ailments and heighten their awareness of fitting the chronically ill with their organisation. In its collaboration with Central Singapore CDC, SingHealth will provide more assistance by expanding on the CDC's existing employment programme to match jobseekers with employers. The move paves the way to go beyond financial assistance and address the larger social issues patients face. Says Ms Long Chey May, Head of Social Services at SGH: "In the course of our work, we see patients with chronic illnesses who face a cyclical problem of unemployment, chronic medical issues and financial concerns and we saw the need to address a broader spectrum of social concerns and advocate for services when appropriate. We hope to do this through establishing meaningful collaborations with strategic partners such as the Central Singapore CDC, so that we can help our patients in a more holistic manner."



Adds Ms Manogaran Bharathi, Medical Social Worker, Singapore General Hospital:

"We feel a deep sense of achievement to see the patients landing jobs and are motivated to continue to look into ways to provide more seamless care for them."

The programme has an optional work trial component, allowing patient and employer to assess if there is a good fit. A period of work attachment of five to seven days allow patients to have hands-on experience of the job requirements. Also, patients will be given a job trial allowance, which is funded by the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) to defray travelling and meal expenses. Employers too benefit from the opportunity at no cost to try out the patient and determine his or her suitability for the job.

With the programme, patients too become more employable as training opportunities are provided and patients can upgrade their knowledge and skills for better prospects. The training is fully sponsored by the WDA as well.

Feedback

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