New and amended Medicare items for psychiatrists

Background
From 1 November 2006 new Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items will be introduced with higher schedule fees and rebates for patients seeing a psychiatrist for the first time. These items complement new general practitioner (GP), psychologist and allied mental health items.

As part of the initiative, the fees for items 291 and 293 (GP referred patient for assessment and management plan) have also been increased significantly to support management of patients by GPs where this is appropriate.

The aim is to encourage private psychiatrists to see more new patients, and to refer on to psychologists and GPs those patients whose needs can be met by these clinicians, thereby improving and increasing access to appropriate mental health care.

These changes have been developed in consultation with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists and the Australian Medical Association.

Overview of the changes
There are three new psychiatry items. The Medicare rebate where services are delivered out of hospital is $195.50.

(1) Initial consultation for a new patient in consulting rooms (item 296)
• Involves a professional attendance of more than 45 minutes by a consultant psychiatrist upon referral from a medical practitioner, where the patient is a new patient to that psychiatrist, or a patient who has not been seen by the consultant psychiatrist in the preceding 24 months.

(2) Initial consultation for a new patient in hospital (item 297)
• Involves the same elements as item 296, but the service is provided in a hospital.

(3) Initial consultation for a new patient, home visit (item 299)
• Involves the same elements as items 296 and 297, but the service is provided at the patient’s home.

Consultant psychiatrist, referred patient assessment and management plan
In addition to the above new items, the rebates for existing items 291(plan) and 293 (review) have been increased to $340 and $212.50 respectively.

Consultant psychiatrist, referred consultation
A separate but associated initiative that is consistent with the aims and structure of the broader Better Access initiative is a small increase in rebates for standard consultation items 304, 306, 314, 316, 319, 324, 326, 334 and 336.
Access to mental health services

Item 296, 297 or 299 will apply once only for each new patient on the first occasion that the patient is seen by that consultant psychiatrist, unless the patient is referred by a medical practitioner practising in general practice for an assessment and management plan. In this case the consultant psychiatrist, if he or she agrees that the patient is suitable for management in a general practice setting, will use item 291 where an assessment and management plan is provided to the referring practitioner.

As part of this initiative, psychiatrists will also be able to refer patients directly on to MBS-funded clinical psychology and other allied mental health services, thereby providing increased access for patients.

Further information

More detailed information on the psychiatry items is available from www.health.gov.au or by calling Medicare Australia on 132 150 (for medical practitioners) or 132 011 (for patients). New MBS items are subject to the normal MBS regulatory approval process.