



Let's Hear from

The Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) provides middle and lower income Singaporeans with subsidies for medical care and dental services at participating clinics near their homes. Response from the public to this scheme has been encouraging, and the number of successful CHAS applicants is expected to exceed 240,000 by end 2012.

Having more GPs participating in CHAS is paramount to its success. Since the roll-out of CHAS in mid-January 2012, the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) together with other stakeholders, have been introducing steps to simplify the administrative and operational aspects of CHAS. Improvements to the online claims portal were made in phases since June this year, and GPs can look forward to more technological enhancements in 2013. It is good for participating GPs to note that they are not limited to charging a cap level of medical fees, but can charge within a reasonable range instead. If clinics need assistance in administering CHAS or would like to receive one-to-one training, they can call AIC during office hours to make arrangements.

Here's what Dr Rodney Lim of Healthlink Medical Clinic and Surgery has to say about CHAS, why he signed up to be on it and how the scheme has benefited his patients.

AIC: What made you sign up for CHAS?

Dr Rodney Lim – RL: I registered my clinic for CHAS in November 2011, when it was still known as the Primary Care Partnership Scheme and since then, I have been seeing more CHAS patients. It's the first such scheme introduced by the Ministry of Health (MOH) to benefit the patients directly by helping those who are financially in need. Since joining CHAS, my clinic's business has grown, and more importantly, I am able to provide a higher level of primary care to my patients without them worrying about their financial means.

AIC: How have your patients benefited from the scheme?

Dr Lim: My patients have benefited in several ways. Firstly, the \$18.50 rebate allows me to prescribe better medications, which tend to be slightly more expensive, to my patients when they need them, without imposing too



much financial strain on them. Secondly, my patients are more likely to seek medical consultation early when they are ill because of the subsidy. Thirdly, they are able to enjoy the convenience of visiting my clinic, which is close to their homes, experience shorter waiting times (compared with the outpatient department), obtain better medications when needed, and even have minor procedures done if necessary. When patients are unwell, it's understandable that they prefer not to travel far to see a doctor, so being able to visit a CHAS clinic in their neighbourhood really helps. Lastly, the four visits per month criterion allows my patients to come back for review, and such follow-ups are important in ensuring that I am able to treat their medical conditions until they are fully recovered.

AIC: How has administering CHAS at your clinic impacted your clinic operations?

Dr Lim: For acute illnesses, \$18.50 is deducted directly from the patients' total bill and they only need to top up the difference. The scheme is straightforward and how it works is easily understood by my patients, especially the elderly ones. The claim submissions done via the CHAS website thus far have been relatively hassle-free. I find the website design simple, straightforward and easy to

a CHAS GP...

By Agency for Integrated Care

navigate. On average, my CHAS submissions can easily be done in between patients' consults as it takes only about two to three minutes to complete it.

AIC: What's your advice to GPs with regard to signing up for CHAS?

Dr Lim: I strongly encourage more GPs to come on-board! It's a win-win situation for your patients and the clinic. On one hand, your patients can benefit directly from the \$18.50 rebate. On the other hand, your clinic can see an increase in patients as you cater to patients under CHAS. I have seen more elderly patients seeking medical consultation early whenever they are not feeling well because of the rebate, so you can greatly contribute to monitoring and managing their overall health early, at the onset of any medical conditions, rather than later. And this is important in the treatment of chronic conditions.

AIC: What improvements would you like to see for CHAS?

Dr Lim: For acute conditions, perhaps bigger subsidies to benefit patients even more. I'm also wishing for more subsidies to be given for procedures, for example, \$20 for incision and drainage, intra-articular injections, hydrocortisone and lignocain injections, paring of callosities, and nebulisation, etc. Again, providing an upfront lump sum subsidy for these would be appreciated. Another would be to provide subsidies for flu vaccination, especially for the elderly and sickly, eg, those who are above 60 years old, or those with diabetes, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and so on. A one-time subsidy would be good.

I find the reimbursement for chronic illnesses more difficult. It would be better if this process could be simplified, similar to making claims for acute conditions, which is a lump sum subsidy given per visit per month.

I am also looking forward to the day when a subsidy could be given for blood tests that are mandatory for patients claiming under the Chronic Disease Management Programme (CDMP), eg, some arrangement or agreement could be made with certain laboratories to offer discounts for patients under the CDMP scheme, so that more funds are available for patients' chronic medications.

AIC: What is your experience with using CHAS Online? (<https://pcps.gpcare.sg>)

Dr Lim: So far, it has been good. The website is easily accessible via SingPass. The claims I need to make are straightforward and quick. Reports can easily be downloaded for my clinic to keep track of claims, and these are usually paid up within a month.

AIC: Has the support provided by AIC – on-site training, account servicing, and GP hotline – been useful?

Dr Lim: Whenever I encounter any problems, my emails to gp@chas.sg have been promptly answered and my problems attended to. I have also received follow-up calls from AIC to ensure that my problems are solved.

Dr Lim is part of more than 500 GPs participating in CHAS. AIC would like to invite more GPs to be part of CHAS so that more people who qualify for this scheme can enjoy affordable healthcare at clinics close to them. The number of CHAS beneficiaries is expected to increase next year.

AIC, which was set up by MOH to oversee healthcare integration in Singapore, is the one-stop contact point for GPs and dentists for CHAS (<http://www.chas.sg>). For more details, please contact the CHAS hotline at 6632 1199 or email gp@chas.sg. **SMA**