

ASO issues warning over health fund SEF forms: it's an invasion of the doctor-patient relationship.

Friday 5 February 2016

The Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) has issued a strong warning to private health insurance funds over their introduction of Specialist Eligibility Forms (SEF).

The forms, which began appearing last year, are asking doctors to give pre-approvals on surgeries listed on the Medical Benefits Schedule BEFORE the private health fund will release its cover to patients. The forms are also an attempt to wedge hospitals by threatening their funding.

After seeking advice from the Australian Government Department of Health, the ASO sees the activity of private health funds as contrary to the Private Health Insurance regulations.

President Dr Michael Steiner says health funds are effectively interfering with clinical decision-making by doing this, as well as creating an administrative nightmare for medical practices and private hospitals throughout the country.

“The ASO is deeply concerned about this situation, Dr Steiner said.

This is a fundamental threat to high quality, safe specialist medical practice.”

“Health funds have taken it upon themselves to implement a requirement for pre-approvals which acts to interpose them in the clinical decision-making process and allow their purely administrative decisions on patient care to take precedence over that of the treating specialist,” he said.

“This presents a whole raft of problems – for doctors and for patients. It is managed care and Australia does not want to go down that road. It has said an emphatic no to this previously.”

The ASO is fielding calls daily from doctors and patients who have been affected by the situation. Surgeries are being cancelled and patients are under unnecessary stress in relation to the uncertainty of their private health fund cover.

This has the potential to put private health insurance into the ‘trash’ category of investments.

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The ASO calls on the Health Minister, Sussan Ley to intervene urgently before Private Health Insurers do further damage to Australian healthcare.

SEFs or 'pre-approvals' explained

Visit the ASO webpage dedicated to this issue: <http://www.asoeye.org/managed-care>

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