

SMA Survey on Specialist Fees in Singapore

INTRODUCTION

Following the withdrawal of the SMA Guideline on Fees (GOF) with effect from 1 April 2007, it was decided to conduct surveys on the cost of GP clinic practice costs, as well as specialist fees, in Singapore.

The two surveys are intended to provide information, to both the profession and the public, on the prevailing charges of medical services in the private sector. The SMA survey on GP Clinic Practice Costs was published in the November 2007 issue of *SMA News*.

This report outlines the first SMA Survey on Specialist Fees in Singapore which was conducted from February to August 2008.

METHODOLOGY

Self-administered questionnaires (see Appendix A) were sent to a list of 152 specialists in private practice, who were randomly selected from the register of medical specialists at the Singapore Medical Council website at <http://www.smc.gov.sg>. Respondents in the following specialties were targeted:

- Cardiology
- Cardiothoracic Surgery
- Gastroenterology
- General Surgery
- Hand Surgery
- Neurology
- Obstetrics & Gynaecology
- Ophthalmology
- Orthopaedic Surgery
- Otorhinolaryngology
- Paediatric Surgery
- Plastic Surgery
- Respiratory Medicine
- Urology

The 152 specialists were selected by picking every fifth name in the above specialties. Should the name belong to a specialist in public service, the next name on the list would be selected as long as it belonged to a private specialist.

The questionnaires did not contain any serial numbers to ensure respondents' confidentiality. To ensure returns, SMA staff followed up with the selected respondents. Completed questionnaires were put into a sealed box when SMA staff visited the doctor's clinic for collection of the questionnaires.

RESULTS

A total of 78 questionnaires were returned. The response rate was 51.3%.

1. BREAKDOWN BY SPECIALTY

Returned questionnaires came from the following specialties:

• Cardiology	6	• Ophthalmology	6
• Cardiothoracic Surgery	3	• Orthopaedic Surgery	9
• Gastroenterology	4	• Otorhinolaryngology	5
• General Surgery	8	• Paediatric Surgery	1
• Hand Surgery	1	• Plastic Surgery	2
• Neurology	2	• Respiratory Medicine	5
• Obstetrics & Gynaecology	20	• Urology	6

2. USUAL/AVERAGE CHARGES IN HOSPITAL FOR PATIENTS

- (a) Daily attendance charge
 (i) Normal/General ward
 (ii) ICU ward

	Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed	ICU
Mean	\$175.75	\$144.38	\$130.49	\$117.03	\$202.18
Median	\$150	\$150	\$122.50	\$100	\$200
10 th Percentile	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100
90 th Percentile	\$250	\$200	\$200	\$150	\$300

3. USUAL/AVERAGE CHARGES FOR OPERATIVE PROCEDURES

- (a) Major surgery (level 1)

	Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed
Mean	\$7,831.25	\$7,193.75	\$6,578.85	\$5,760.42
Median	\$8,000	\$6,800	\$6,300	\$6,000
10 th Percentile	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$2,500
90 th Percentile	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000

Examples of major surgeries (level 1) most frequently performed include:

- Hepatectomy
- Open heart surgery
- Total gastrectomy
- Total joint replacement
- Vaginal fistula repair
- Wertheim's operation

- (b) Major surgery (level 2)

	Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed
Mean	\$4,578.75	\$4,036.90	\$3,789.77	\$3,534.52
Median	\$4,250	\$4,000	\$3,550	\$3,250
10 th Percentile	\$1,900	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
90 th Percentile	\$7,500	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$5,500

Examples of major surgeries (level 2) most frequently performed include:

- Angioplasty
- Caesarean section
- Cholecystectomy
- Hemiarthroplasty
- Hemi-colectomy
- Hysterectomy
- Laminectomy
- Nephrectomy
- Thyroidectomy

- (c) Major surgery (level 3)

	Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed
Mean	\$2,932	\$2,723	\$2,561	\$2,439
Median	\$2,750	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500
10 th Percentile	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,200
90 th Percentile	\$5,000	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$3,500

Examples of major surgeries (level 3) most frequently performed include:

- Arthroscopic meniscectomy
- Breast biopsy
- Cardiac catheterisation
- Cataract
- Cystectomy
- ERCP
- Herniorrhaphy
- Haemorrhoidectomy
- Laparoscopy
- Ovarian cystectomy
- Tonsillectomy

(d) Minor

	Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed
Mean	\$1,115.91	\$1,051.06	\$942.71	\$875
Median	\$1,000	\$800	\$800	\$775
10 th Percentile	\$500	\$500	\$400	\$400
90 th Percentile	\$1,800	\$1,600	\$1,500	\$1,500

Examples of minor surgeries most frequently performed include:

- Amniocentesis
- D & C
- Diagnostic colonoscopy
- Excision of cyst and small lumps
- Haemorrhoidectomy
- Ingrown toe nail
- Lymph node excision
- Vasectomy

(e) Office therapeutic procedures

(i) Simple, most frequently performed

(ii) Complex, most frequently performed

	Simple	Complex
Mean	\$300.63	\$552.12
Median	\$200	\$450
10 th Percentile	\$52.50	\$180
90 th Percentile	\$725	\$1,000

Examples of simple procedures most frequently performed include:

- Cauterisation
- Cortisone Injection
- I & D
- IUCD
- Removal of cast
- Suturing of superficial lacerations
- Ultrasound

Examples of complex procedures most frequently performed include:

- Application of cast
- Circumcision
- Excision of sebaceous cyst
- Gastroscopy
- Myringotomy & grommet insertion

(f) Do you perform minimal access surgery (e.g. laparoscopic surgery)? If you do, how many percent extra do you charge as compared to open surgery?

	No	Yes
Responses	26	39
Mean		12.2%
Median		10%
10 th Percentile		0%
90 th Percentile		30%

(g) Do you perform emergency surgery? If you do, how many percent extra do you charge as compared to elective surgery?

	No	Yes
Responses	18	48
Mean		18.6%
Median		20%
10 th Percentile		0%
90 th Percentile		30%

4. USUAL/AVERAGE CHARGES FOR OUT-PATIENT CONSULTATIONS

(a) In-office consultation

- (i) Short consultation (up to 10 minutes)
- (ii) Long consultation (11 to 20 minutes)
- (iii) Extended consultation (over 20 minutes, per 10-minute block)

	Short	Long	Extended
Mean	\$74.32	\$111.13	\$118.72
Median	\$45	\$80	\$50
10 th Percentile	\$45	\$80	\$30
90 th Percentile	\$110	\$150	\$180

(b) Out-of-office consultation

- (i) Non-emergency consultation (scheduled)
- (ii) Emergency consultation

	Emergency					
	Non-emergency	Weekdays		Weekends		
		0800 – 1659h	1700 – 2359h	After midnight	0800 – 2359h	After midnight
Mean	\$188.82	\$175	\$225.35	\$284.42	\$250	\$300
Median	\$200	\$200	\$200	\$300	\$250	\$300
10 th Percentile	\$100	\$80	\$120	\$150	\$150	\$150
90 th Percentile	\$300	\$300	\$350	\$450	\$300	\$450

5. USUAL/AVERAGE CHARGES FOR MEDICAL REPORTS

(a) Policy examination

- (i) Ordinary examiner's fees
- (ii) Special/Preferred examiner's fees

(b) Medical reports

- (i) Simple report/completion of questionnaire
- (ii) Standard report
- (iii) Specialist medical report
- (iv) Specialist report for court attendance

(c) Renewal of policy examination

- (i) Ordinary examiner's fees
- (ii) Special/Preferred examiner's fees

(d) Workmen's compensation case

(e) Handling charges (e.g. transport, postage, etc)

	Policy Examination		Medical Reports			
	Ordinary	Special	Simple	Standard	Specialist	Court
Mean	\$131.79	\$198.24	\$110.60	\$148.90	\$254.97	\$605.78
Median	\$140	\$150	\$100	\$150	\$200	\$500
10 th Percentile	\$75	\$75	\$75	\$80	\$100	\$150
90 th Percentile	\$250	\$350	\$200	\$250	\$500	\$1,250

	Renewal of Policy Examination		Workmen's Compensation	Handling Charges
	Ordinary	Special		
Mean	\$117.14	\$147.95	\$176.83	\$66
Median	\$100	\$150	\$160	\$50
10 th Percentile	\$75	\$75	\$75	\$7.50
90 th Percentile	\$150	\$200	\$300	\$175

6. HAVE YOUR CHARGES BEEN ADJUSTED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

	No	Yes
Responses	38	36
Mean		11.8%
Median		10%
10 th Percentile		5%
90 th Percentile		20%

Of those who did not adjust their fees, the reasons were:

- No increase in patients.
- Did not see the need to raise fees.
- Charges are already fair and adequate.
- Able to maintain operating costs.
- Remain competitive.

Of those who raised their fees, the reasons were:

- GST increase.
- Generally no increase except for special cases – corporate clients.
- Increase in rental/payroll/operating costs/overheads.
- Removal of SMA Guideline on Fees.
- Inflation.

None of the respondents lowered their fees in the last 12 months.

CONCLUSIONS

This survey was conducted to give us an idea of specialist fees. Unfortunately, our response rate was only 51.3% despite repeated attempts by SMA staff to persuade the non-responders to submit their forms. We also appreciate that it is difficult to compare procedures in different specialties and the SMA believes that this may contribute to the wide variation in charges within each category of surgical procedure.

Nonetheless, the range of fees between the 10th and 90th percentiles still provides us with valuable information.

We look forward to your feedback and suggestions so that we can provide more accurate data on specialist fees in our future surveys.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to express our appreciation to all respondents who have participated in this survey. ■

APPENDIX A



SMA Survey on Specialist Fees in Singapore

1. This is a self-administered questionnaire. Please complete this questionnaire and seal it in the SMA envelope provided.
2. SMA representatives will personally pick up the completed questionnaire from your clinic.
3. If you require assistance with the completion of the questionnaire, please contact the SMA Secretariat at telephone 6223 1264.
4. All returns will be kept confidential and only aggregate results will be reported.

1. Your MAIN field of practice (select only ONE)

- Cardiology
- Cardiothoracic Surgery
- Gastroenterology
- General Surgery
- Hand Surgery
- Neurology
- Obstetrics & Gynaecology
- Ophthalmology
- Orthopaedic Surgery
- Otorhinolaryngology
- Paediatric Surgery
- Plastic Surgery
- Respiratory Medicine
- Urology

2. Your usual/average charges in HOSPITAL for patients

- (a) Daily attendance charge
(i) Normal/General ward

Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed
\$	\$	\$	\$

(ii) ICU ward Daily fee \$ _____

3. Your usual/average charges for operative procedures

(Underline only ONE procedure you most frequently perform and give the average charge for the procedure. If the list does not include the procedure you most frequently perform, please write under 'others'. If you don't perform any procedure under this category, leave it blank.)

(a) Major surgery (level 1), most frequently performed

(e.g. oesophagectomy, total gastrectomy, hepatectomy, open heart surgery, brain tumour surgery, total joint replacement, vaginal fistula repair, Wertheim's operation, others _____)

Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed
\$	\$	\$	\$

(b) Major surgery (level 2), most frequently performed

(e.g. thyroidectomy, mastectomy, hemicolectomy, cholecystectomy, nephrectomy, prostatectomy, hysterectomy, caesarean section, hemiarthroplasty, laminectomy, varicose veins, mastoidectomy, angioplasty, others _____)

Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed
\$	\$	\$	\$

(c) Major surgery (level 3), most frequently performed

(e.g. ERCP, breast biopsy, appendectomy, haemorrhoidectomy, herniorrhaphy, laparoscopy, ovarian cystectomy, bone biopsy, ESWL, tonsillectomy, cataract, arthroscopic meniscectomy, tympanoplasty, cardiac catheterisation, others _____)

Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed
\$	\$	\$	\$

(d) Minor, most frequently performed

(e.g. diagnostic colonoscopy, excision of cyst and small lumps haemorrhoidectomy, vasectomy, lymph node biopsy, D & C, amniocentesis, tenotomy, matrixectomy for ingrown toenail, lipectomy, others _____)

Deluxe	Single	2-Bed	4-Bed
\$	\$	\$	\$

(e) Office therapeutic procedures

(Underline only ONE that you most frequently perform and give the average charge for the procedure. If the list does not include the procedure you most frequently perform, please write under 'others'. If you don't perform any procedure under this category, leave it blank. Charges should be quoted exclusive of laboratory test, X-ray, ECG.)

(i) Simple, most frequently performed
(e.g. cauterisation, cryotherapy, I & D, IUCD, aspiration of joint, cortisone injection, suturing of superficial lacerations, ultrasound, removal of cast, others
_____) \$ _____

(ii) Complex, most frequently performed
(e.g. circumcision, application of cast, excision of sebaceous cyst, gastroscopy, myringotomy & grommet insertion, others
_____) \$ _____

(f) Do you perform minimal access surgery? (e.g. laparoscopic surgery)

Yes
(How many percent extra do you charge as compared to open surgery? _____ %)

No

(g) Do you perform emergency surgery?

Yes
(How many percent extra do you charge as compared to elective surgery? _____ %)

No

4. Your usual/average charges for OUT-PATIENT consultations**(a) In-office consultation**

(i) Short consultation (up to 10 minutes)
\$ _____

(ii) Long consultation (11 to 20 minutes)
\$ _____

(iii) Extended consultation
(over 20 minutes, per 10-minute block)
\$ _____

(b) Out-of-office consultation

(i) Non-emergency consultation (scheduled)
\$ _____

(ii) Emergency consultation

Weekdays		Weekends/ Public Holidays	
0800-1659 h	\$ _____	0800-2359 h	\$ _____
1700-2359 h	\$ _____	After midnight	\$ _____
After midnight	\$ _____		

5. Your usual/average charges for medical reports
(Please indicate 'NA' if you do not write such reports.)**(a) Policy examination**

(i) Ordinary examiner's fees
\$ _____

(ii) Special/Preferred examiner's fees
\$ _____

(b) Medical reports

(i) Simple report/completion of questionnaire
\$ _____

(ii) Standard report
\$ _____

(iii) Specialist medical report
\$ _____

(iv) Specialist report for court attendance
\$ _____

(c) Renewal of policy examination

(i) Ordinary examiner's fees
\$ _____

(ii) Special/Preferred examiner's fees
\$ _____

(d) Workmen's compensation case

\$ _____

(e) Handling charges (e.g. transport, postage, etc)

\$ _____

6. Have your charges been adjusted in the last 12 months?

No change.
Why? _____

Increased by _____ %
Why? _____

Decreased by _____ %
Why? _____

NA (e.g. not in private practice 12 months ago)

Thank you very much for participating in the SMA Survey on Specialist Fees in Singapore.