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
- Cardiothoracic Surgery 3
- Gastroenterology 4
- General Surgery 8
- Hand Surgery 1
- Neurology 2
- Obstetrics & Gynaecology 20
- Ophthalmology 6
- Orthopaedic Surgery 9
- Otorhinolaryngology 5
- Paediatric Surgery 1
- Plastic Surgery 2
- Respiratory Medicine 5
- Urology 6
2. USUAL/AVERAGE CHARGES IN HOSPITAL FOR PATIENTS
   (a) Daily attendance charge
   (i) Normal/General ward
   (ii) ICU ward

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deluxe</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>2-Bed</th>
<th>4-Bed</th>
<th>ICU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$175.75</td>
<td>$144.38</td>
<td>$130.49</td>
<td>$117.03</td>
<td>$202.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$122.50</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Percentile</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90th Percentile</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

   Examples of major surgeries (level 2) most frequently performed include:
   • Angioplasty
   • Caesarean section
   • Cholecystectomy
   • Hemiarthroplasty
   • Hemi-colectomy

   Examples of major surgeries (level 3) most frequently performed include:
   • Arthroscopic menisectomy
   • Breast biopsy
   • Cardiac catherisation
   • Cataract
   • Cystectomy
   • ERCP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deluxe</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>2-Bed</th>
<th>4-Bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$2,932</td>
<td>$2,723</td>
<td>$2,561</td>
<td>$2,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$2,750</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Percentile</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90th Percentile</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>$3,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   Examples of major surgeries (level 3) most frequently performed include:
   • Herniorrhaphy
   • Haemorrhoidectomy
   • Laproscopy
   • Ovarian cystectomy
   • Tonsillectomy
(d) Minor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deluxe</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>2-Bed</th>
<th>4-Bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$1,115.91</td>
<td>$1,051.06</td>
<td>$942.71</td>
<td>$875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>$775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Percentile</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Percentile</td>
<td>$1,800</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Complex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$300.63</td>
<td>$552.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Percentile</td>
<td>$52.50</td>
<td>$180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Percentile</td>
<td>$725</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Percentile</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Percentile</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(g) Do you perform emergency surgery? If you do, how many percent extra do you charge as compared to elective surgery?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Percentile</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90th Percentile</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Short</th>
<th>Long</th>
<th>Extended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$74.32</td>
<td>$111.13</td>
<td>$118.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$45</td>
<td>$80</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Percentile</td>
<td>$45</td>
<td>$80</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90th Percentile</td>
<td>$110</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Out-of-office consultation
   (i) Non-emergency consultation (scheduled)
   (ii) Emergency consultation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Emergency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekdays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emergency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$188.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Percentile</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90th Percentile</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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, tenotomoy, matrixectomy for ingrown toenail, lipectomy, others ____________________________)
      Deluxe | Single | 2-Bed | 4-Bed
      $       | $       | $       | $        

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(c) 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


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.