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AFTER HOURS ARRANGEMENTS FOR PIP

As previously reported (GPNN 27 October 2007) the AMA has asked Medicare Australia for a definitive explanation of the eligibility requirements for claiming Tier 3 of the After Hours PIP, in particular whether any types of cooperative arrangements meet this criteria. This follows a Medicare decision last year to recover payments made to a number of practices that covered the after hours period through a cooperative arrangement. At appeal it was determined that these practices were actually eligible to claim tiers of the After Hours PIP.

The AMA has recently received the following advice on this issue: "A key eligibility requirement for accessing Tier 3 of the PIP After Hours Incentive is that the general practitioners must provide their practice patients with 24-hour cover, seven days a week, including out of hours visits where necessary and appropriate. The use of a deputising service or participation in a roster system with other practices does not count towards this tier. Tier 3 payments are not generally available to practices participating in cooperative arrangements as practice GPs are not usually providing cover to their practice patients for the entire after hours period.

"However, practice GPs participating in cooperative arrangements and also providing their practice patients with access to 24-hour cover, seven days a week, may be eligible for Tier 3. Practices in this category do not always provide sufficient documentation to Medicare Australia to demonstrate that they are providing their practice patients with 24-hour cover, seven days a week."

While this does not clearly identify what it was about the above practices' cooperative arrangements that made them successful in their appeal, the AMA can only conclude that it was because all of the practices involved in the cooperative had a doctor available for on-call work at all times, with the primary on-call responsibility rotating between practices.

If practices have questions about what level of the After Hours PIP they are eligible for they should contact Medicare. Practices should also make sure they provide the necessary documentation to Medicare to support any PIP claim.

NATIONAL HPV VACCINATION PROGRAM

GPs should be aware that a public information campaign on the HPV vaccination program kicks off this Sunday. Until July, the vaccine will be administered through a school-based program, it will only become obtainable through GPs in July. However, patients may approach their doctor with questions about this vaccine as they become aware of its availability. Below is the information on the program that is available at this stage. Updates will be provided as it progresses.

Starting in April 2007, the Australian Government will provide the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine GARDASIL® free to all women and girls aged between 12 and 26 through the National HPV Vaccination Program. Advertisements for the program targeting parents and the general public will begin to appear in the media from 11 March. More detailed information about the vaccination program will be available for GPs in the coming weeks. Information resources will include:

- A dedicated page for GPs on the National HPV Vaccination Program Website at www.australia.gov.au/cervicalcancer
- A 'cheat sheet' summarising patient eligibility, vaccine dosage and contraindications, distributed via the Divisions of General Practice and available online
- A direct mailout to GPs across Australia in mid-March
- Advertising in medical journals in mid-April

From April, the vaccine will be administered to girls aged 12-18 through school-based programs. From 1 July 2007, the free vaccine will also be available from GPs and community immunisation clinics to young women who have not received the vaccine through the school program and are still aged under 27. The vaccine will be available for this group for two years, until 30 June 2009. The vaccine is given in a series of three injections, spread out over a six-month period. Doctors should note that each State and Territory is responsible for distribution in their jurisdiction and this may impact on rollout.

In addition to administering the vaccine, GPs are also asked to remind patients about the continued importance of regular pap smears, and encourage women receiving the vaccine to include their details on the National HPV Register. Further information about the register will be forthcoming once it is launched.

For more information, contact the Immunise Australia National Infoline on 1800 671 811.