

Chief Health Officer
PEI Department of Health and Social
Services
Charlottetown, PEI

Delays in CPP payments to physicians

After becoming exasperated by delays in getting paid for work done for the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), I decided to document the next problem I faced. It has taken an average of at least 3 to 4 months to receive payment for completing CPP medical disability forms (fee of \$65) and narrative report forms (fee of up to \$150).

The case I documented involved a narrative report I completed and forwarded to the CPP in May 1999. It took more than 3 hours to prepare. After 2 months without payment, I began making phone calls, noting the names of the people I spoke with and the times the calls were made. I made 9 calls in all. Despite being assured each time that my enquiry would be passed to the appropriate party and my call returned within a week, I did not receive a single reply.

By now 4 months had elapsed, and my patient had been granted her disability pension. My payment finally arrived in October 1999, after a final call to the CPP's Ottawa office.

I documented this single case because of curiosity about how long payment could be delayed. I now wonder how many other physicians are being similarly inconvenienced, and how many would take the time to make a single phone call, let alone 9 of them.

Have other physicians had the same problem with tardy payments? If there is a problem, pressure should be exerted on CPP administrators to clean up their act.

As well, consideration should be given to special payments when narrative reports take more than an hour to prepare. Limiting payments to \$150 puts physicians in a potential conflict-of-interest situation. When long, com-

plex letters are called for, either the physician's time or the patient's interest gets sacrificed.

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[A spokesperson for the Canada Pension Plan responds:]

There is a need to clarify the difference between submitting a medical report and a narrative report. When dealing with an initial application, physicians always have a choice as to how they report to us. In directions attached to the medical report, we state: "To assist us in determining eligibility, please complete this form on his/her behalf. . . . You may substitute this report with a narrative letter or computer printout."

With respect to an initial medical report, the fee is the same for either method. According to the instructions, "CPP will assist with the cost of completing the medical report by paying up to \$65 directly to you."

Fees rise if we request additional medical information to support an application. A physicians' fee guide is then sent to physicians to assist in determining their fee "up to \$150." In summary: \$25 for photocopied information from the patient's chart, \$50 for a short narrative reply, \$100 for a full narrative report and \$150 for a complete, detailed report involving more extensive chart review and preparation.

Our financial department tries to return payment for medical reports submitted to Canada Pension Disability in 3 to 4 weeks. Delays may occur, however, when we encounter an influx of applications or when there is a disagreement about the fee structure.

We thank Ken Richter for his patience in resolving his personal matter. We regret that not all of his calls were answered, and apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused. We sincerely appreciate the efforts made by all of the physicians who respond to us on

behalf of their patients, our clients.

Kate Bedding
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