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Doctor fees: Transparency is key

We refer to Ms Christine Chen Siew Mei's letter ("How to decide if doc is overcharging?", April 16). To clarify, CASE does not always require fees to be paid whenever consumers approach us. Consumers can seek advice via phone, email or walk-in consultation at no charge. Our officers will advise consumers on a case-by-case basis and highlight the various options of recourse. Only when consumers request for us to represent them and manage their complaints would they need to join us as members.

As to the writer's concerns about overcharging, we believe that free competition will work against doctors who charge excessively. With free competition, there will always be a range of fees that doctors charge and consumers can choose the doctor that fit their budget. Doctors who intend to charge a certain level of fee will need good reasons to do so. Doctors who price themselves out of the market may lose their patients to doctors who charge within the market rates.

We encourage clinics to practise transparency by prominently displaying the costs of consultation and other medical services at the entrance and at the registration counter. This will ensure that walk-in consumers are fully aware of the charges before they seek a consultation and prevent disputes over fees. Cost-conscious consumers should call up a few clinics to enquire about the consultation fees, so they can make comparisons. We also expect doctors to itemise their charges, so that consumers are able to determine the cost of consultation vis-à-vis the costs of other related products and services.

While we believe that fees will not differ significantly after the withdrawal of SMA guidelines, we will continue to monitor the situation and may conduct price survey of medical practitioners' fees in future.

Should the public have queries on any consumer issue, they can call 6463 1811 or email complaints@case.org.sg

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