



Dear patient,

You may have noticed that our practice has recently come under new management this year. You have likely already seen us around - we've been a part of Brookwater General Practice for many years. We would like to introduce ourselves as the new joint Practice Managers - Ashlee (previously reception 2IC) and Melinda (previously Nurse Manager). Feel free to say Hi when you're next in the practice!

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and co-operation over the last 2 years. Covid has certainly made us all learn to be more flexible. During the pandemic we're had to rapidly adapt to change and introduce policies consistent with best practice at the time. We are grateful to our GPs who have also been working hard under demanding conditions.

To highlight the main points of this letter;

- All noted changes regarding billing will come into effect 1/5/22
- If booking a standard appointment – please ensure this is for one specific issue only
- You may find that although you have been previously bulk billed by our GPs for your appointments, this may not continue as this is not financially feasible for the practice and therefore we encourage all doctors to adhere to the existing and updated billing policy
- All long (20 minutes and upwards) consults will result in private billing, including those for concession card holders.
- All long (20 minutes and upwards) appointments for children, apart from childhood immunizations and care plans will be privately billed.
- All Saturday appointments will incur a private fee, including appointments for children.
- All procedures will incur a private fee (as per doctors discretion)

We urge you to please read on, as we would like you to further understand the circumstances surrounding our decisions.

Over the last 2 years, the practice has been bulk billing more consultations. This is because of a combination of factors. Firstly, when telehealth was rolled out, the government mandated that this must be bulk billed. This policy has subsequently been amended; however, some people have continued to be bulk billed. Secondly, GPs are acutely aware of the financial burden that people have suffered because of the pandemic. Lastly, for a multitude of reasons, some patients have required additional care during the pandemic. When patients are coming in regularly, their consults might be discounted or bulk billed.

Medicare was initially introduced as an insurance scheme for patients to claim a rebate for the care they received. Over the years, this rebate has not kept pace with the cost of providing quality care. To be able to bulk bill, a high patient throughput is required. Did you know that Medicare reimburses consults the same whether they are 6 minutes or 19 minutes (level B consult)? You may have noticed that many bulk billing doctors encourage you to discuss only one problem per consult. If you need to discuss something else, you must book another appointment. Consultations are frequently only 5-6 minutes long. This high throughput medicines allows bulk billing to continue for those that cannot afford to pay an out of pocket fee for their care.

At MyLife Medical Brookwater, we do not believe that this is the best way to do medicine. Slower, more holistic medicine, requires adequate history taking and examination. We like to make a thorough plan and arrange follow-up as required. Unfortunately, this can rarely be done in just 6

**Effective 01/05/2022**

minutes! Additionally, administration and nursing staff assist in the care of patients – directly at the time of the consultation, and indirectly, helping doctors follow-up important results and reminders for ongoing care. This is the reason MyLife Medical Brookwater was established as a Mixed Billing Practice. As we move towards the future and review the viability of how we are able to continue to offer the high-quality services that we wish to continue to offer to our community we have to adhere to our billing policy strictly to make this work. From the 1st of May 2022 all long consults will be privately billed regardless of concession card status. Additionally, much like other practices in our area we will be introducing private billing for everyone on a Saturday, children included. An extension of this includes privately billing all long kid's consults apart from childhood immunisations & routine childhood appointments including careplans. From this time the doctors within the practice have been directed that as the patient-rebate from Medicare doesn't cover the practice expenses they need to follow the billing policy of the practice. Some patients might have been bulk-billed even though they didn't fit into our category of bulk-billing. This will not be able to occur any more.

Our costs continue to increase and the current rebates do not come close to covering these costs. We have therefore directed GP's to significantly reduce their patient bulk billing. If this doesn't happen, we will need to reduce our nursing and reception services, or shorten appointments, limiting consultation duration. This will have a negative impact on the quality of our health care. This is an outcome we are keen to avoid.

We hope our patients value the care that we provide at MyLife Medical Brookwater, and now have a better understanding of why bulk billing is not sustainable.

Our billing policy and fee schedule are available at reception and on our website. If you have any questions, please call reception – we are always happy to clarify things.

If you are a privately billing patient and are in financial stress, please see us to discuss your options. Additionally, we would encourage you to speak to Centrelink regarding your eligibility for a low income concession card. If you decide that you no longer agree with our ethos and billing policy, we are always happy to forward a patient summary to a practice of your choice (hopefully as a very last resort!).

Sincerely,

Ashlee and Melinda  
(Practice Managers)

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