



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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Health Service Executive
Finance Shared Services



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Circular No. 021/09

11th November 2009

Re: Out of Hours Claims

Dear Doctor,

As you will be aware, it is recognised that a Medical Card/GP Visit Card holder may require a non routine consultation that, because of its urgency, is necessarily carried out on a Saturday, Sunday or a bank holiday, or outside of 9am to 5pm on a Monday to Friday. In order to recompense the GP for the disruption that such an exceptional circumstance may give rise to, the contract provides for the payment of an out-of-hours fee, as long as the consultation is not during normal surgery hours or part of an overflow from normal surgery hours.

The HSE has completed a review of Out-of-Hours claims by GPs. The review indicates a very high level of claims between 8-9am and 5-6pm Monday to Friday, and during particular hours on a Saturday. This suggests that at least some of the claims being made are in fact claims in respect of consultations during scheduled surgery hours, or overflow from such surgery hours, rather than urgent out-of-hours consultations. Claims for out-of-hours fees may also be being made in respect of consultations that could have been carried out by a local GP co-operative.

Given the very high cost of out-of-hours GP services (which totaled €108m in 2008, €41.585m of which was made up of out-of-hours fees) and the need for the HSE to manage expenditure, you will understand that the HSE must ensure that only valid claims for out-of-hours fees, meeting the conditions of the contract, are paid. In order to address the concerns raised in the review, and assist the HSE in verifying the validity of claims, the STC Form that is used to claim out-of-hours fees has been amended. Only claims for out-of-hours fees using this amended form will be accepted by the PCRS from 1st December 2009.

It is therefore very important that you use the amended STC form for any out-of-hours claims you wish to make from that date. For accountability reasons, claims will only be reimbursed in situations where the HSE is satisfied of their accuracy and reasonableness. Your co-operation in this regard is appreciated.

I should also draw your attention to the fact that GPs should ensure that their routine hours of availability have regard to patient needs in the locality. If it is the case that a very high number of patients are presenting outside of normal surgery hours (or overflow) for non urgent issues, this may suggest that the normal surgery hours need to be reviewed in order to have regard to patient needs.

Yours faithfully,

Patrick Burke,
Primary Care Reimbursement Service.