

NEWS & UPDATES

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Dear Colleague,

The impact of recent Medicare reforms on Sleep investigations

- By now you are aware that a sleep study can be requested subject to two positive “sleep questionnaires” (must be an ESS and OSA 50 or STOP-BANG or Berlin). This is despite the fact that the correlation between ESS and AHI is minimal!! And the sensitivity of all these questionnaires is at best 80%, that is one every 5 patient would be missed.

- **No accreditation for sleep lab required.** It is beyond comprehension that Medicare did not consider mandatory that a sleep investigation unit performing studies needs accreditation by NATA (like any other lab, be it pathology, radiology etc.), guaranteeing a minimal standard.

In our area the only accredited units are Sleep Medicine (our service) and John Hunter Hospital. By and Large I will not accept studies performed by pharmacies or other non-accredited operators, in particular for medico-legal certification, because often the studies are scored by the software rather than visually scored.

- We see all the patients that have a study within our service, with a system of priority based on severity (within four weeks if severe, two months if moderate). We recommend that patients investigated elsewhere, be seen by the reporting doctor who is responsible for the conduct of the study and quality of the recording.

- **Home studies vs in lab studies.** A supervised study remains the gold standard internationally with home studies having a 5 to 7% failure rate. Most importantly *home studies underestimate* severity because the number of apnea hypopneas is divided by recording time rather than sleep time, in level 3 studies (no EEG).
- **Maintenance of Wakefulness Test (MWT).** This is the standard test to ascertain ability to maintain alertness, in assessing fitness to drive or safety in the workplace. The international standard *does not require* (as mandatory) an overnight sleep study the night before. Again with no explanation Medicare has made an overnight test mandatory for reimbursement, making the whole process more difficult. However we can still perform a MWT without a study the night before, but the patient needs to bear the cost of \$325.
- Oxymetry is no longer covered by Medicare but is still available at a cost of \$70 to the patient.
- We welcomed Dr Ray Mariasoosai to our practice last year and Dr Alyssa Arnold this year.

Best Regards,

Antonio Ambrogetti