

Advice to patients about pathology testing

Medical inflation in South Africa is consistently higher than the general levels of inflation in the South African economy.

Although pathology tests are an essential part of modern medicine there are steps that you can take to insure that you are correctly billed only for the tests your doctor specifically requests.

This is according to Veripath, an independent pathology risk manager for medical funders and administrators. The company offers the following advice to scheme members on what to do about Pathology testing and its costs

1. Remember that excess and unnecessary testing increases the account. This account is either your responsibility or that of your medical aid. The cost if borne by the medical aid are eventually paid for by you via increased contributions.
2. When your Doctor orders lab tests ask how much this should cost - remember it's your money! Ask if all of these tests are necessary?
3. Ask if your doctor receives any financial advantage as a result of this referral?
4. Ask why the Doctor prefers a certain laboratory?
5. There are medical technologist laboratories available in South Africa that charge 26% less for tests. In addition these labs are not allowed to perform "shopping lists of tests", these profiles increase the costs of pathology testing.
6. Have you had these tests recently, if so must they be repeated? When you are referred from a GP to a specialist, ask the GP to send all relevant lab results with the referral. This may prevent unnecessary and costly repeats. Point out to the specialist that you have previously had lab tests performed.
7. Ask the lab to give you a copy of the request form when they take the blood or other specimen for your tests. This request form should be designed according to National Pathology Group guidelines. Some Pathology labs may automatically add on extra tests to those that the doctor ordered. Some Pathology labs may not adhere to the profiles as set by the National Pathology Group.
8. If the account arrives and the amount is different from that which your doctor indicated then ask your doctor to explain the difference. If necessary the doctor should phone the laboratory to confirm the account.