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Knee surgery rehabilitation: new research not the full story

Patients requiring complex knee surgery and significant rehabilitation will lose out on essential care for the sake of big insurance companies cost savings, if new research is taken as a blanket response for all care, warns the Australian Private Hospital Association (APHA) CEO Michael Roff.

Mr Roff said the research funded by private health insurer HCF showing home-based rehabilitation had the same clinical outcomes for patients undergoing uncomplicated knee arthroplasty treated in hospital was over simplified.

“Community and home-based therapy for uncomplicated knee surgery is often undertaken. This is a ploy by insurers in their battle to end mandatory cover for rehabilitation – to suggest in-patient rehabilitation is not necessary is dangerous and may put many thousands of Australians who require intensive rehabilitation following complex surgery at risk of not being able to access it.

“Like most areas of health care this is not a black and white issue and surgery will impact different patients in different ways. For example, elderly patients with co-morbidities may benefit significantly from in-patient rehabilitation and may not recover well from their surgery without it.

“We would rather talk about improving patient care, but if insurance companies are only concerned about profits then they should consider that many times rehabilitation is the difference between recovery and further complications and cost down the track,” Mr Roff said.

Epworth Health Care Rehabilitation Physician Dr Steve De Graaff said he was encouraged to see health insurers consider supporting multi-disciplinary rehabilitation care in the community and homes for patients who might benefit from it. But he warned against a “one size fits all” approach.

“Where a patient post-knee surgery has significant co-morbidities and their health is at risk, discharge into the community would put them further at risk and increases their potential for readmission due to complications. In-patient rehabilitation is the standard treatment of those patients,” he said.

Mr Roff said the insurance companies continue to try and restrict rehabilitation cover for members, which is mandatory in all private health insurance policies.

“This is just another salvo that puts cost savings ahead of patient care, it could have disastrous consequences for many Australians who just want to get back on their feet and get moving again,” he said.

Medical professionals who can comment further on this research:
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