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Fee for `second consultation' is unethical

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I RECENTLY went to see a gastro-enterologist at a private hospital. After the visit, I immediately settled the bill for RM222.40.

As requested, I returned over the weekend to hear the result of my blood test. This took a short while, and I left thinking the visit had cost me nothing.

The next day, I got a call from the doctor's assistant, saying I had not settled the bill of RM67 for the "second consultation".

What consultation, I asked? I thought it was merely to get my test result, something that I have obtained free in private clinics in the past.

I felt no consultation in the real sense was involved on my return visit. I was there to get the result of my blood test. Hence, on grounds of principle I felt the second consultation fee was unjustified.

In my opinion, both the consultation and blood test fees are too high. The former cost nearly RM100 and the latter came to RM124.90. The same test would have cost RM40 at a laboratory which I checked with later.

Moreover, a patient's subsequent visit, merely to hear a test result should not be considered a consultation. This is not ethical.

I am a retiree for whom every ringgit counts. I went to this private hospital because we get medical attention faster. On that day, my abdominal pain was quite severe, and I know that going to a government hospital to get an appointment to see a specialist would have meant a long waiting period.

In fact, the day before, I had phoned a government hospital to see the gastro-enterologist, and was told I would have to wait three months. Thereafter, a diagnostic scan or scope given by the specialist would entail a further wait of a few more weeks, even months.

So this dilemma continues. Government hospitals? A long, long wait. Private hospitals? Exorbitant charges.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's recent call to private hospitals to reduce their charges is timely. But will they comply? To me, it seems unlikely. Perhaps some legislation would have a persuasive effect - like compliance with a government-initiated scale of reduced fees and,