

HONG KONG

\$30,000 bill to go under the knife

By JANE MOIR

THE average private patient spends \$12,497 on surgeons' fees and \$6,900 on hospital expenses per treatment, a new survey shows.

But together with the cost of a room, physicians, hospital expenses, anaesthetist's fees, and the use of an operating theatre, charges escalate to more than \$30,000 on average.

the survey by the Medical Insurance Association of the Hong Kong Federation of Insurers found.

Insurers who are footing the bill for nearly 80 per cent of these costs are eagerly awaiting a follow-up poll to gauge the exact extent of rising pri-

vate health expenses. In six months alone, Hong Kong's main insurers footed the bill for \$367.98 million in private health costs.

For room and board, 15 per cent of patients paid \$1,000 to \$1,400 or more per day, with the average length of stay being four days.

On top of this, hospital fees of \$6,000 to \$10,000 or above

were charged to 32.2 per cent of patients.

Another 38.3 per cent paid \$10,000 to \$20,000 or more in surgeons' fees to hospitals. The average anaesthetist's fee was \$4,170, and the price of using an operating theatre \$4,195 on average.

Further, patients paid on average \$661 a day for room and board in private hospitals.

A daily visit from a physician while in hospital was \$807 a day on average.

Touting it as the first survey of its kind in Hong Kong, the association is set to calculate the inflation rate for medical fees when a similar survey is completed in November.

"Charges will never be going down," association chairman Patricia Tang Mei-yin

said. "We have to wait until the results come in [from the next survey] to be more specific."

A spokesman for health insurer BUPA said their premium costs had increased alongside medical inflation, thought to be between six to 10 per cent. She was unwilling to give details on premiums.

Prices for individual opera-

tions vary greatly. Open heart surgery, for example, costs up to \$180,000 at some private hospitals.

The median fee for a caesarean section is \$31,800 and a coronary artery bypass is \$76,122.

Hong Kong Medical Association president Dr Lee Kin-hung defended the prices, which he said were "not unex-

pectedly high" and comparable with the "standard of living and all professional fees, not just doctors".

"Even salaries are much higher in Hong Kong than in Asia and other advanced countries," he said.

"If medical inflation is only less than six per cent, it's even less than the rate of inflation."