



## **PAY FOR UNITS OR PAY FOR AREAS? CLEARING UP THE CONFUSION**

OK so this can be a very confusing topic. What are 'units'? Why do some clinics charge for muscle relaxant injections according to 'areas'? Why does the number of units needed vary from clinic to clinic? How can it cost the same for my friend when she had way more wrinkles than me? Is there more than one product available to relax muscles?

This is actually very difficult to explain and even when I was considering how to structure the billing at my clinic, I pondered over the decision of whether to charge for 'units' or 'areas' for a very long time!!

I will try to make it very simple and explain it all in sections.

Let's start with how muscle relaxants are packaged. OK so there are two main competing companies in Australia, both produce Botulinum A protein and for government restriction reasons, no one can mention their names. Both companies package the product in powder form in little bottles and yes, they do have to be 'reconstituted' i.e. saline (salt water) has to be added to the bottles to dissolve the powder into a liquid injectable form. Of course, each company specifies the amount of saline that is to be used for this process and I am not going to get in to any discussions about the issue of over-diluting, that is for you to debate amongst yourselves.

Now the two different bottles hold a different 'number of units' of Botulinum protein, one of them (product Y) holds 100 Y units and the other (product Z) holds 500 Z units. That's the easy bit! Where it gets more complicated is the comparison of the 'strengths' of each product. One thing to remember is that the 'unit' mentioned above in relation to each of the two products is completely different. It is a measurement but it is not a comparable measurement of effect between the two products. The effect of 1unit of product Y is different to the effect of 1unit of product Z (by the way I am using the letters Y and Z instead of A and B in case I may have got in to trouble using B as a letter!!). So if you are not already confused I will carry on!

OK so we have two different company products that are the same i.e. Botulinum A protein and they are both measured in 'units' but these measurements are totally unrelated. Now, as clinicians we have two products we can use that ultimately do the same thing i.e. relax muscles but we now need some way of calculating what dose of each product we use in our injections to achieve the same result. Now we could and probably should just treat each one as a separate product in its own right e.g. in the same patient - 10 Y units of product Y is used to relax the frown and 18 Z units of product Z can also be used to relax the frown to the same degree. But this creates some difficulty in having two different billing structures for the two products and we all like some 'uniform' consistent way of working out what we have spent and what we have got in return for our money.

How we as clinicians get around this problem, is to find out what the comparative strengths of effect are for 1unit of the two products. Now, we are informed by the companies that 1unit of product Y is equivalent in its effect to 2.5 units of product Z. So if the 'unit' is a measurement of comparable effect and the bottle of reconstituted product Y contains 100 Y units, the bottle of reconstituted product Z contains 250 units equivalent to those 100 units. So, 1 Y unit of product Y = 2.5 Z units of product Z in relation to its effect on the muscle.

OK so we now know how the effects of the two products compare in terms of how many 'units' of each product is needed to achieve the same result. Next, we have to figure out how to charge for these products. Once again, we could just charge differently for each product but this is confusing. Some clinics just avoid this whole issue of number of units and comparative units by charging a certain amount 'per area' and then using a fixed amount of whichever product they want. But what if the wrinkles on your forehead are much less than the wrinkles on your friend's forehead? Why should you pay the same as her? Well you shouldn't! No two people are alike, even identical twins can have very different patterns of wrinkles. So if you are actually getting fewer doses than her wouldn't you be better off just paying by the unit?

Ultimately, that argument was the reason why I decided to charge people by the unit and not by the area. It gives me a method of ensuring a very 'individual' treatment and it gives my clients a precise way of knowing exactly what dose is needed for their particular problem. It also gives them a method of judging how competitive my prices are and if they do decide to move on to another clinic they can stipulate the number of units they have needed in the past to treat the same problem. I have to admit, I love seeing new clients that have had treatments before using this method. They know the number of units used to treat a particular problem and I then have a baseline to work with. Nice and simple! Just remember to find out though, whether the units are measured according to company Y or company Z e.g. did you have 20 product Y units or 50 product Z units (an equivalent effect would be achieved from both these doses).