Find out which hospital has cheapest prices

Website tracks costs for 100 common procedures

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Anyone who has visited a doctor for an outpatient procedure knows there’s a little way of telling how much it will cost at the outset. To help give consumers a better sense of differing prices, the Indiana Hospital Association, in an attempt to reduce at least a little of the obscuring behind medical costs, has added about 50 outpatient procedures to its website that tracks hospital costs.

MycareInsight.org, unveiled two years ago, started with sharing costs for 100 common hospital procedures like deliveries and hip replacements. Recently, it expanded to include some of the most common outpatient procedures offered, such as having ear tubes inserted to guard against repeat infections. The website draws upon hospital charge data from the Indiana State Department of Health.

The website provides numerous caveats to visitors about how literally to take the information.

“We always suggest to patients they need to go back to their hospital and insurance,” said Bernice Ulrich, vice president of data services and information technology for the hospital association. Because a person’s out-of-pocket costs may depend on his or her insurance as well as specifics of the care he or she receives, many hospitals sit down with patients in advance of their procedures to estimate the final bill. Indiana University Health, for instance, has a team of experts called its patient financial navigation team, said Jennifer Alvey, chief financial officer and senior vice president.

The Indiana Hospital Association website aims to serve as a starting point for that discussion.

MycareInsight.org allows visitors to search by condition or hospital and compare up to three hospitals with one another. The website also offers quality information for each hospital. Charges for the same procedure can vary widely from hospital to hospital in the same region.

Openness. The state average for the removal of tonsils and the adenoids is $9,697. But if you head to IU Health North for it, it costs $10,712. Riley Hospital for Children is even more expensive at $11,340 and St. Vincent Indianapolis even costlier at $15,137.50. But the same procedure is $2,269.50 at St. Vincent Fishers Hospital and $6,733 at Columbus Regional Health, according to the website.

Kidney stones. Many area hospitals charge around the state average, $21,583 for this procedure, give or take a few thousand. At IU Health Methodist, the cost is $21,199. The price is somewhat lower at IU North and West, $19,594 and $17,470, respectively.

Cataract with lens placed. Here, Community North Hospital comes far below the state average of $88,582 with its charge of $5,955.50 for the eye operation. Eskenazi Health charges $9,755 compared with priecier suburban hospitals, Riverview Health ($10,765) and Major ($10,017).

Colonoscopy. The charge for a screening colonoscopy can sometimes double the state average of $4,320 or be less than half. IU Health University charges $10,139, compared with Riverview Health’s $2,012 or St. Vincent Carmel’s low price of $608, all for the same procedure.

Appendix. Yes, this can be an outpatient procedure, but it’s not going to be cheap. IU Health Methodist charges $45,290, compared with the state average of $25,511.50. Franciscan Health Indianapolis comes in below the state average at $26,029 and Hancock Regional Health is even cheaper at $18,496.50. The contrast between St. Vincent Indianapolis noted on the website and sister hospital in Fishers is even starker — $33,620 compared with $5,233.

St. Vincent Health, however, says that the pricing at its two hospitals should be similar and more in line with the cost at its Fishers facility. Hospital officials have been in contact with Indiana Hospital Association officials to discuss why the site’s numbers do not reflect that, said Tangelra Floyd, a St. Vincent spokeswoman.

But the hospital still had words of praise for the new tool.

“St. Vincent is supportive of consumer transparency tools, such as MyCareInsight, that allow our patients to compare general procedure pricing,” hospital officials said in an emailed statement and urged consumers to talk to their insurance and healthcare providers for more precise information.

IU Health Methodist Hospital often far exceeds the state average and other hospitals on many of these, even those in its own system, because of the nature of patients it treats, Alvey says.

“Methodist handles the most complex services in the state. They have a little more complicated patients than anyone else,” she said.

Many of the patients who choose to have outpatient procedures done at Methodist want to make sure they’re in a place that can provide appropriate care should something go wrong with what would be a routine procedure for a healthier person, Alvey added. Healthier patients may opt to go to a suburban IU Health hospital, where the charges might not be as steep.

Even there, the charges will likely not be uniform from one hospital to another. Different hospitals may “bundle” pricing differently; some may include more of the costs associated with the procedure in the charge; others will separate costs out and just provide one piece of the care as the cost associated with it.

“We are a heavy bundling institution. We like to put all of our charges together,” Alvey said. “We talk about a happy meal versus a la carte. .. We have all aspects of the happy meal in it.”

The website also offers insight into how long the median visit to an emergency room may take and once more the measure varies widely from hospital to hospital.

Arrival to discharge. Be prepared to wait if you head to the Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Hospital’s emergency room. The median wait there is 181 minutes. St. Vincent Indianapolis and IU Health Methodist, both large hospitals, also post lengthy waits of 178 and 149 minutes respectively. But if you can make it to the Riverview Health emergency room in Noblesville, your median wait is 99 minutes.

Median wait to see provider: Once more emergency room visitors to Eskenazi can expect long waits, 43 minutes from when they arrive to see a provider. Contrast that with Major, where the median wait is only four minutes. But you don’t have to head that far out of town for a short wait; Community North and South Hospitals and IU Health North all post waits just under 15 minutes.

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