

Costs of neck and back conditions increasing in U.S.

September 11 2012



Image courtesy of Blausen Medical

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Matthew A. Davis, D.C., M.P.H., from the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice in Lebanon, N.H., and colleagues examined expenditures on common ambulatory health services for the management of back and neck conditions in a cross-sectional survey of non-institutionalized U.S. adults. Data were obtained from Medical Expenditure Panel Survey respondents from 1999 to 2008.

The researchers found that approximately 6 percent of U.S. adults reported an ambulatory visit for a primary diagnosis of a back or neck condition. The mean inflation-adjusted annual expenditures on medical care for such patients increased by 95 percent from 1999 to 2008 (from \$487 to \$950), with most of the increase due to elevated [costs](#) for medical specialists. The mean inflation-adjusted annual expenditures for chiropractic care were relatively stable, with a reduction noted in costs for [physical therapy](#), which was the most costly service overall.

"Although this study did not explore the relative effectiveness of different ambulatory services, recent increasing costs associated with providing medical care for back and neck conditions (particularly subspecialty [care](#)) are contributing to the growing [economic burden](#) of managing these conditions," the authors write. "Our findings will help inform future studies that examine the relative cost-effectiveness of these services. [Health policy makers](#) should consider these [findings] when developing national strategies to manage the large population of Americans with spine conditions."

One or more of the authors disclosed a financial tie to a commercial party related to the subject of this article.

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Citation: Costs of neck and back conditions increasing in U.S. (2012, September 11) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-09-neck-conditions.html>

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