

Hospital bills can vary widely, even in same cities (Update)

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New U.S. initiative designed to bring more transparency to cost of health care.

(HealthDay)—The fees that hospitals charge consumers or insurance providers for services vary widely across the United States, and can even vary within geographic regions and cities, federal officials reported Wednesday.

Details on the costs of the 100 most common Medicare inpatient stays was gathered from 3,400 hospitals and made public by the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Here's one example of a regional price difference: A joint replacement ranges from a low of \$5,300 at a hospital in Ada, Okla., to a high of \$223,000 at a hospital in Monterey Park, Calif.

Even within the same geographic area, there can be huge variations in what hospitals charge for similar procedures. For example, treatment of

heart failure ranges in Jackson, Miss., from a low of \$9,000 to a high of \$51,000; and in Denver from a low of \$21,000 to a high of \$46,000.

Along with the release of these figures, U.S. Health and Human Services secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced funding for data centers that will collect, analyze and publish pricing and medical claims reimbursement data.

The figures provided by the data centers will enable consumers to compare the different prices charged for a specific procedure, she said.

"Currently, consumers don't know what a hospital is charging them or their insurance company for a given procedure, like a knee replacement, or how much of a price difference there is at different hospitals, even within the same city," Sebelius said in an HHS news release. "This data and new data centers will help fill that gap."

Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said in the news release: "Transformation of the health care delivery system cannot occur without greater price transparency. While more work lies ahead, the release of these hospital price data will allow us to shine a light on the often vast variations in hospital charges."

More information: To visit the HHS pricing website, click [here](#).

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