

Study Snapshot:

“What’s Your Price?” Many Americans Seek Health Care Prices, Fewer Compare across Providers

May 2015

key findings

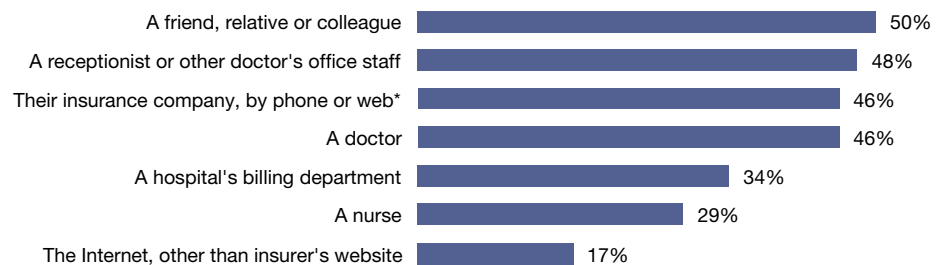
- Slightly more than half (56 percent) of Americans have tried to find information about health care prices before obtaining care, including 21 percent who have compared prices across multiple providers.
- People who compared prices across multiple providers are more likely to make health care decisions for an adult family member or receive regular medical treatment themselves.
- Most Americans who have compared prices say that they saved money.
- The majority of Americans do not believe that higher-priced care is necessarily better-quality care.
- Most Americans are unaware that prices may vary across health care providers.

The Question

How are Americans using price information in health care?

As Americans shoulder more of their health care costs, a new study suggests that many are hungry for price information. In a study funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation,¹ Carolin Hagelskamp, Ph.D., and David Schleifer, Ph.D., Public Agenda, conducted a national survey of 2,010 American adults during the summer of 2014 to examine their opinions, preferences, current habits, barriers, and needs with regard to price information. The full results of their study are available in a Public Agenda *report*. An overview and summary of the key findings are also available in a related *research brief*.

Percent who say they have tried to find price information before getting care, from the following sources:



Base: Tried to find price information before getting medical care, n=1,164.

* Base: Tried to find price information before getting medical care and currently or ever insured, n=1,128.

The Implications

Despite widespread interest in health care prices, several hurdles stand in the way of making health care price information more accurate, comprehensive, and readily available to consumers.

Study findings indicate most Americans have already sought price information before getting care; that individuals who compared prices across multiple providers believe that they saved money; and that more people want to know the prices of medical services in advance and are willing to choose less expensive providers. Yet, most Americans are not aware that prices vary, potentially keeping them from comparing prices or shopping for health care services. Further, Americans are split on whether it is reasonable to expect patients to compare prices before obtaining care. Half of Americans who did not seek price information do not know how or where to find such information. In order to better engage Americans in choosing high-value care, more outreach and education are needed to inform the public about reliable sources of price information. Caregivers and individuals receiving regular medical care may be most receptive to engagement efforts, given that they were more likely to compare prices. Finally, many patients seek price information from receptionists and hospital staff, insurance companies, doctors, hospital billing departments, and nurses. As such, providers, payers, and their staff need enhanced capacity to discuss prices with patients.

Contact Us

For more information on the results from this grant, please contact the principal investigators Dr. Carolin Hagelskamp (chagelskamp@publicagenda.org) or Dr. David Schleifer (dschleifer@publicagenda.org) or call 212-686-6610.

¹ This project was funded as part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) solicitation *Understanding the Use and Impact of Price Data in Health Care*

If you would like to learn more about other related work, please contact:
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