
Augusta Health

Fishersville, Virginia

224 beds

56,530 ED visits

11,173 inpatient admissions

Impetus for Initiative: Four years ago, Augusta Health began its transparency initiative to improve the patient experience. It uses a team of financial counselors to proactively reach out to each patient who has a scheduled service and provide pricing information, including the expected out-of-pocket obligation, ahead of time. Augusta Health uses a commercial vendor, Recondo Technology, to develop the pricing information. Recondo ties together chargemaster pricing data with the terms of the hospital's various insurance contracts to estimate an average price for each service specific to each payer. Augusta Health's registration system connects to insurance company databases so the out-of-pocket estimate provided to patients reflects the current status of coinsurance, copayments and deductibles.

Augusta Health carefully scripts financial counselors to clearly communicate with patients that the information provided includes just the expected obligation for the hospital portion of the service and is only an estimate. Financial counselors also discuss options for payment and financial assistance. Training is extensive because of the sensitive nature of the conversation.

Community response has been positive. Augusta Health not only provides this information to patients with scheduled services, but also to people seeking pricing information prior to scheduling.

Challenges: The biggest challenges in implementing its program were to convince Augusta staff and physicians of the benefits of having this conversation upfront and finding the right individuals for the financial counselor positions.

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