

AHA Secret Shopper Exercise

This exercise enables hospital leaders to get a shared sense of the challenges consumers face in trying to access hospital price information.

Consumers are taking a more active role in seeking information about the price of health care services. Become a “secret shopper” for two health care services provided by your hospital or a hospital in your health system and then repeat the process for one health care service provided by an independent, non-hospital provider of the same service.

Hopefully, as a result, you will have a better sense of the challenges consumers face trying to access health care price information, as well as how that might differ across various provider types.

- 1. Place two anonymous calls to your hospital or a hospital in your health system.** Start with the general phone number to see where the patient gets directed. You may want to make the call from a phone outside the hospital if you have caller ID or even ask someone to place the calls for you. This is also a good opportunity to engage trustees and/or your consumer advisory group in your price transparency efforts by asking them to participate in the exercise.
 - ❖ Tell the person who answers the phone that you are looking for price information, and ask for the price of a different hospital service for each call. Once you are in the right place, present yourself as an uninsured patient. Suggest that you do not qualify for reduced prices and are interested in the full charge amount. Please ask for information on the price of the following services:
A magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of one shoulder; and total knee replacement.
(Note: if your hospital does not provide these services, feel free to choose an inpatient and outpatient example of your choice.)
 - ❖ **Take notes on the process and response you get.** How was your request handled? What area of the organization were you directed to? What kind of information was offered? How many times was your call transferred? How many minutes did it take you to get an answer? Did the hospital employee note that you might receive bills from other providers, such as a radiologist, surgeon or anesthesiologist for the same services? Did hospital personnel offer any information on financial assistance policies? Please remember, this is an opportunity to identify some of the challenges consumers face and understand how we can better serve them and is not intended to single out the responsiveness of individual employees.

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2. Place a third anonymous call to an independent, non-hospital provider (e.g., imaging center.)

Ask for the price of an MRI of one shoulder. Again take notes on the process, focusing on the differences in how the calls were handled by your hospital and by the other provider.

3. Move the findings to staff discussions and take action. This exercise is only as valuable as it is actionable. Meet with staff to talk about the secret shopper exercise and open up a dialogue about what's working and what can be improved. Leave these discussions with a plan for how you will move forward.