

Floridian Emergency Department Fees Vary Significantly Based on Type of Control and Patient Characteristics

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Floridian Emergency Department Fees Vary Significantly Based on Type of Control and Patient Characteristics

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BACKGROUND

Emergency department (ED) visits are billed using a 5-level system with level 1 visits being the least complex and level 5 visits being the most complex. The majority of ED visits are billed as level 4 or level 5. Data from over 10 years ago showed that there was substantial variation in these fees from hospital-to-hospital. Given the new price transparency rule enforced by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), we felt that a reassessment of ED visit fees was warranted. Thus, we sought to determine the level 4 and level 5 ED visit fees for all hospitals in Florida and explore the relationship between these fees and hospital characteristics.

METHODS

This was a cross-sectional analysis of EDs in the state of Florida listed on the American Hospital Association website as of October 13, 2021. We excluded military hospitals and psychiatric hospitals from the analysis. Next, we utilized the AHA directory to record the following for each ED: type of control (for-profit, governmental, church, or other nonprofit), hospital system, number of staffed beds, and academic affiliation. We then searched each hospital's website for their chargemaster (which is required to be publicly available by federal law) and found the standard charges for both level 4 and level 5 ED visits. Next, we searched the Florida Health Finder website to record the total number of visits for each ED in 2018 along with all of the following patient characteristics: age (65-74, 75-84, >85), ethnicity (Hispanic, non-Hispanic), race (Caucasian, African American), principal payer (Medicare, Medicare Managed Care, Medicaid, Medicaid Managed Care, Self-Pay, Non-payment). With this data, we calculated the mean and median ED fees statewide. Finally, we performed univariate and multivariate linear regression to determine which hospitals and patient population characteristics are associated with higher emergency department fees.

RESULTS

Between October 13, 2021 and November 10, 2021, there were 216 Floridian hospitals listed on the AHA website. We excluded 36 psychiatric and military hospitals. Two hospitals gave an error when attempting to open the chargemaster. Thus, in total, we analyzed the ED visit fees of 178 hospitals. In this group, the median level 4 visit fee was \$2243.50 (IQR: \$1670.30-\$3504.70); mean \$2925.20 (SD \$2225.90); minimum \$276.10; maximum \$14,067.50. In the same group, the median level 5 visit fee was \$ 3251.00 (IQR: \$2243.50-\$4836.20); mean \$4091.80 (SD \$3022.19); minimum \$401.90; maximum \$17,526.00. On multivariate analysis, significant predictors of higher ED visit fees included for-profit hospitals ($p = 0.004$, slope = 22234) and percent Caucasian patients ($p = 0.026$, slope = -24.5).

CONCLUSION

Visit fees vary widely among emergency departments across Florida. Specifically, there is marked variation in ED visit fees among type of control and patient race. Future analysis should be conducted to determine what other differences in medical care systems and patient characteristics may contribute to these varying emergency department visit fees.