



Eight Great Tips For Pricing Hospital Services

With more consumers responsible for some or all of their health care costs, there is a greater need for hospitals to provide easy-to-understand pricing information about the cost of services and procedures. Consumers can play their part when shopping for hospital services by asking the right questions.

These consumer tips are based on the results of a recent “mystery shopper” study conducted by the California HealthCare Foundation (CHCF) at 64 California hospitals.

1. **Call first.** Shoppers who called a hospital were more likely to obtain pricing information than those who made in-person visits.
2. **Know the code.** Once your doctor has explained the nature of the service or procedure you need, ask for the procedure code (CPT or ICD-9). It may save time.
3. **Be specific.** Ask for the department responsible for pricing for patients paying for services themselves. If the hospital lacks such a department, try Admitting, Financial Counseling, Billing, or the Cashier's Office.
4. **Find out what's included.** The mystery shopper study found little consistency among hospitals in terms of the type of prices quoted, making apples-to-apples comparisons difficult.
5. **Ask about a discount.** If you don't you ask, it almost certainly won't be offered. Find out how much and under what conditions discounts apply (such as paying by cash or credit card).
6. **Request a payment plan.** If this is an option, how does it work? What are the restrictions? Mystery shoppers found that about half the hospitals contacted required payment upfront; others required payment in full within 45 days of service.
7. **The more complicated the procedure, the longer it can take.** For example, you may find it easier to obtain the price of a radiology test or CT scan than a more complex procedure such as cardiac catheterization.
8. **Be persistent.** While hospitals recognize the need for better customer service, many remain unprepared for these types of requests.

For more information about the mystery shopper report, *Price Check: The Mystery of Hospital Pricing*, visit www.chcf.org.