

Six Ways to Slash Your Health Care Costs

(DALLAS, Dec. 17) -- *The following feature is by Devon Herrick, PhD, Senior Fellow at the National Center for Policy Analysis:*

People often assume they have little control over how much they spend on health care. After all, sickness cannot be scheduled, doctors prescribe treatments and employers provide health coverage to more than 60 percent of Americans. However, there are many overlooked ways to trim your health costs and still get the care you need.

Cut your prescription costs: Asking questions, research and making some phone calls can make a significant dent in your drug bill.

There can be options for treating some medical conditions with more than one specific drug. Always ask your doctor about therapeutic substitutes and/or generics. Of course, large name pharmacies now offer \$4 monthly and \$10 quarterly costs for many drugs. Mind your co-pay rate; these low prices are sometimes less than your drug plan's co-pay, so make sure you pay the lesser rate. You can compare prices among local pharmacies and reputable Websites by calling or Googling your prescribed dose. For example, Rxaminer.com or pillbot.com have free pharmaceutical cost comparisons.

If a brand name drug is best for your particular condition, ask your doctor about free samples. It's unusual for free samples to be available for generic drugs. The samples are promotional tools for newer, more expensive drugs.

Also, check the drug manufacturer's website for each of your prescribed drugs. Many manufacturers now post discount offers, coupons, rebates and cost assistance programs. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor or pharmacist about over-the-counter options. There may be drugs or even diagnostic tests that can help manage some temporary and chronic illnesses, and cost a lot less than prescriptions. In fact, nearly one-thousand current OTC drugs were once available only by prescription. These include allergy remedies, pain relievers and heartburn medications.

Pay less for a consultation: Retail clinics (such as MinuteClinic or RediClinic) or telemedicine services that offer phone and online consultations (such as TelaDoc) can cost significantly less than traditional office visits. A visit to a walk-in clinic can result in a bill that is less than half of what you'd see from a doctor's office visit and a fraction of emergency room treatment. TelaDoc is about \$35 per consultation. Small, free standing clinics like CareNow also offer costs and wait times that are usually well below those in an emergency room. And, don't pass up the opportunity to visit health fairs -- where most services, such as disease screenings, blood tests and risk assessments are often free.

Shop for diagnostic procedures and lab work: Ask about cash rates and discounts. Call different labs in your area and check prices for both cash and your insurance plan's negotiated rate. Paying upfront and/or filing insurance forms yourself may save significant costs. If you are

getting any kind of procedure, make sure -- in advance -- that all providers are in-network, including the anesthesiologist. If uninsured, negotiate in advance of receiving care; check the Internet for discount card programs that lower costs at hospitals, pharmacies, labs and retail clinics.

Also, compare prices at different labs and diagnostic centers. Screenings and tests can be priced up to 80 percent less than the cost for the same services in hospitals or clinics.

Medical Tourism: This term originally meant traveling to another country for treatment, but that's changed. If you are in need of costly surgery, there are increasing numbers of reputable clinics, hospitals and surgery centers in the U.S. willing to compete for business by offering services as a steep cash discount. Search the Internet for competitive facilities that cater to cash-paying patients willing to travel to a neighboring town or state to save money.

If your deductible is high or you're uninsured, consider traveling to another country where the cost of performing surgery can be a fraction of the cost of same procedure in the U.S.

Experts identify India, Singapore and Thailand as the best values, but countries such as Mexico, Panama and Costa Rica have partner relationships with a variety of American hospitals, and provide high quality health care for as much as one-half to two-thirds less the cost of the same procedures in the U.S.

Compare your insurance options: Check your insurance plan; the end of December marks the end of open enrollment at many companies. For those insured through an employer, review your health plan choices. A Health Savings Account (HSA) might save you money over a PPO or HMO, especially with employer contributions. I have saved more than \$12,000 during the past five years by taking advantage of my HSA. If on a non-group plan, shop around and consider raising your deductible to reduce your monthly premium and still maintain major medical and catastrophic coverage.

Become an empowered patient: Do your homework and search reputable websites for information that can help you ask more informed questions and possibly prevent an unnecessary office visit. There are growing numbers of educational websites dedicated to information on specific medical conditions. Many are university-, hospital- or association-based. You can learn to help manage chronic conditions, such as asthma, allergies or diabetes. Participating in the daily treatment of your illness can help minimize costly and dangerous complications. If patients learn to ask more questions, do their homework and take an active role in taking better care of themselves, the payoff can result in both medical and financial benefits for the coming year.

www.ncpa.org
<http://www.john-goodman-blog.com/>

Devon Herrick, Ph. D., is a preeminent expert on 21st century medicine, including the evolution of Internet-based medicine, consumer driven health care and key changes in the global health

market. He was among the first to identify and publish in-depth studies on medical tourism, telemedicine, and "shopping for drugs" strategies.

Dr. Herrick concentrates on a variety of critical health care issues, such as health insurance and the uninsured, patient empowerment and trends in state health policy reform. He has conducted numerous cutting-edge research projects for the NCPA.

The National Center for Policy Analysis is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization headquartered in Dallas with offices in Washington, D.C. The NCPA depends solely on the contributions of individuals, corporations and foundations that advocate private sector solutions to public policy problems. All contributions are tax-deductible, and the NCPA accepts no government grants or contracts.

This feature is for your free and unrestricted use, and is not commercially sponsored.
SOURCE National Center for Policy Analysis