



**PUBLICATION**

Article  
Health

**"How Much Will I Get Charged for This?"**  
**PATIENT CHARGES FOR TOP TEN DIAGNOSES IN THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT**

"How Much Will I Get Charged for This?" Patient Charges for Top Ten Diagnoses in the Emergency Department

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Abstract

**Objectives**

We examined the charges, their variability, and respective procedures for diagnosis and treatment of the ten most common outpatient conditions presenting to the Emergency Department (ED).

**Methods**

We conducted a cross-sectional study of the 2006–2008 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey. Analysis was limited to outpatient visits with non-elderly adult (years 18–64) patients with a single discharge diagnosis.

**Results**

We studied 8,303 ED encounters, representing 76.6 million visits. Median charges ranged from \$100 (\$10–1,000) to average hospitalization charges \$200 (\$10–1,000) for a single diagnosis. The median charge for ED for outpatient conditions was \$2,000 (\$100–10,000) with single charges of \$100–1,000. All diagnoses had an interquartile range (IQR) greater than \$100 with 50% of EDs greater than \$100.

**Conclusion**

Emergency department charges for common conditions are expensive with high charge variability. Greater visit and charge transparency will benefit patients and providers to be more efficient emergency department charges patients may face in the current health care system.

**Figures**

[1]

Charges varied significantly by diagnosis and across EDs for the same diagnosis.

The study examined the charges levied on patients for the diagnosis and treatment of the ten most common outpatient conditions handled in the emergency department (ED). The results of research undertaken by scientists and faculty at the University of California, San Francisco, Stanford University, the University of Minnesota, and Ecologic Institute have been published in the scientific journal PLoS One. Based on a cross-sectional study of the 2006–2008 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, the analysis was limited to outpatient visits with non-elderly, adult (years 18–64) patients with a single discharge diagnosis. A sample of 8,303 ED encounters was analyzed, which is representative of a total of 76.6 million ED visits during the studied 3-year period. It was found that charges varied significantly by diagnosis and across EDs for the same diagnosis.

The study is available for download.

Emergency Departments (EDs) play a key role in the delivery of health care services in the US for a wide variety of acute medical needs. One in every five Americans has at least one visit to the ED per year. Although many people depend on the ED, obtaining acute medical care is increasingly becoming a significant financial burden as total charges for ED services continue to rise.

This study examined the charges faced by patients for the top ten most commonly encountered ED diagnoses. We found that median charges ranged from \$740 (95% CI \$651-\$817) for an upper respiratory infection to \$3,437 (95% CI \$2,917-\$3,877) for a kidney stone. The median charge for all ten outpatient conditions in the ED was \$1,233 (95% CI \$1,199- \$1,268), with a high degree of variability. All diagnoses had an interquartile range (IQR) greater than \$800 with 60% of IQRs greater than \$1,550.

It could therefore be concluded that emergency department charges for common conditions are not only expensive but are also highly variable. With limited transparency and upfront cost-awareness, patients are vulnerable to substantial financial burdens as a result of this variation in emergency department charges in the current health care system.

### **Main Link**

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