



Hand Surgery Cost Analysis and Usability following the CMS Hospital Transparency Rule

Olga Schuth, MD; Annabel Baek, MD; Brian Le, MD

Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Virginia Commonwealth University

INTRODUCTION

- Effective January 1, 2021, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) Hospital Price Transparency rule requires hospitals to establish a public "machine-readable file containing a list of all standard charges for all items and services," along with a "consumer- friendly list of standard charges for a limited set of shoppable services."
- Noncompliant hospitals may be subject to a daily monetary penalty.
- We examine if the Hospital Price Transparency rule has resulted in accessible and consumer-friendly information on costs related to hand surgery by investigating available data for three-view hand x-ray and carpal tunnel release.

METHODS

- We assessed the publicly available chargemasters, price estimators, and associated websites of the top 35 ranked hospitals for orthopedics in the 2020-2021 U.S. News and World Report.
- We evaluated available pricing information of a standard three-view hand x-ray (CPT code 73130), and carpal tunnel release (CPT code 64721).
- Individual hospital websites were searched and analyzed for the availability of the following data: hospital fees, physician fees, discounts, and total charges without insurance (out of pocket).

RESULTS

Hand X-Ray			
Median Hospital Fee	Median Physician Fee	Median Out of Pocket Discount	Median Total Charge
\$848.50 (\$134-\$1,563)	\$168 (\$28-\$308)	50.50% (25%-76%)	\$699.50 (\$73-\$1,326)
33 of 35 available	14 of 35 available	15 of 35 available	33 of 35 available

Carpal Tunnel Release			
Median Hospital Fee	Median Physician Fee	Median Out of Pocket Discount	Median Total Charge
\$12,861 (\$551-\$25,171)	\$20,949 (\$20,949)	60.50% (45%-76%)	\$14,815.83 (\$551-\$29,081)
17 of 35 available	1 of 35 available	4 of 35 available	17 of 35 available

Accessible Information			
Chargemaster + Price Estimator	Price Estimator Only	Chargemaster Only	No Information Available
29	3	1	2

- When available, the price estimators were nearly all identical online programs and easy to use once located, being searchable by CPT code or keyword.
- The chargemasters were often difficult to locate, download, and search, with variations in procedure descriptions, comprehensiveness, jargon, type of file, and use of CPT codes to identify procedures.

CONCLUSIONS

- The available information on these two procedures illustrated vast price differences between hospitals.
- The required pricing information was not publicly available on all hospital websites, and illustrated discrepancies in accessibility.
- For the three-view hand x-ray, the pricing information was generally available on the price estimator tools, which were searchable, and provided more information on the total charge.
- For the carpal tunnel release, the pricing information was not as available or complete, and was usually located on obfuscate chargemasters, which are confusing and difficult tools for patients and surgeons seeking transparent hand surgery costs.
- We propose including all hand surgery costs in the price estimator tools, or as a measured metric within a national hand data registry.

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