

Variations in Medical Care Costs

In the May 22, 2000 issue of the Archives of Internal Medicine appears an article on the variations in costs for the same medical procedures. Researchers from the Program in Clinical Epidemiology and Health Care Research and the Departments of Medicine and Health Administration, University of Toronto and Womens College Health Sciences Centre, Toronto, Ontario surveyed the 2 largest general hospitals from every large city (population >500,000) in the United States and Canada.

The contrasts in fees found in this study are so profound that we thought we would share some of them with you.

Procedure	Minimum Cost	Maximum Cost
Prothrombin blood test	\$2.96	\$118.40
Electrocardiogram with interpretation	3.70	266.89
MRI scan of head with interpretation	\$514.30	\$2000.00
Filling Prozac prescription	\$25.93	\$93.20
Emergency department visit for suture removal	\$30.00	\$700.00
Total knee replacement	\$7,160.47	\$46,985.00

The findings were even surprising to the researchers. In their conclusion they said, *"Charges for the same hospital service vary substantially. Greater visibility might reduce some variation by bringing outliers into closer scrutiny. Patients seeking care and paying out-of-pocket could save financially by comparison shopping."* In this article they print a chart with the highs and lows for certain medical procedures."