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## Report: Virginia health care cost transparency better than most

Latest numbers from nonprofit website show location as largest variable in cost of procedures

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By **Prue Salasky**, [psalasky@dailypress.com](mailto:psalasky@dailypress.com)  
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Virginia ranks in the top seven states for transparency in reporting health care costs, according to a national survey.

The information was released last week online by Virginia Health Information, along with updated cost information for 2012 based on 30 health services. A government-endorsed nonprofit website which has operated since 1993, <http://www.vhi.org> helps to provide a basis for cost comparisons for the consumer.

The nonprofit's numbers allow the uninsured consumer — or the consumer with a high-deductible plan, who is therefore paying out of pocket for many services — to negotiate based on the average payment allowed for particular procedures by nine in-state insurers.

The pricing report compares a variety of services, from doctor visits and preventive services to tests and surgeries.

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"What is unique about our report is not only providing the 'what and why' for the service, but comparisons of costs between similar services provided in a doctor's office, ambulatory surgical center or hospital," said Michael T. Lundberg, VHI executive director, in a

news release.

The site reveals that the biggest differences in cost are driven by the place where a procedure is performed. For example, the average insurance payment for a bone density scan in a physician's office was \$256. That same procedure in a hospital outpatient setting cost more than double, \$549, despite the radiologist and physician being reimbursed at a lower rate. Likewise, hernia repair surgery cost \$3,713 in a licensed ambulatory surgical center, while the average was \$6,407 in a hospital outpatient setting. In the latter procedure, there was no differentiation between the fees paid to the surgeon and anesthesiologist in the different locations.

Colonoscopies, which can be performed in a physician's office (\$1,557), licensed ambulatory surgical center (\$2,376) or hospital outpatient setting (\$3,287), reflected the typical range in average allowed costs according to setting.

While the site doesn't give exact costs, the breakdown by facility fees and compensation for attending medical personnel gives a basic insight into anticipated costs and possibilities for negotiation.

Salasky can be reached by phone at 757-247-4784.

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