



Cost Conversations

CLINICIAN
PERSPECTIVES

Overview

For decades, physicians across different specialties have generally agreed that discussing costs with patients is not only important, but that it is also their responsibility. Most physicians feel that patients' out-of-pocket costs should be considered when making clinical decisions. Yet studies have found variable physician awareness of patient costs and the patient-level impact of the financial aspects of medical care. Some studies have demonstrated that physicians often know or suspect that their patients forgo care or adjust treatment plans (e.g. take less medication) due to concerns about costs, but others have shown low prevalence of physician engagement with patients' financial issues. Consistently, studies have shown that conversations rarely happen in clinical settings, due to a variety of barriers.

Patient-Physician Communication About Out-of-Pocket Costs

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Barriers to Patient-physician Communication About Out-of-pocket Costs


G. Caleb Alexander, MD, MS, Lawrence P. Casalino, MD, PhD, Chien-Wen Tseng, MD, MPH, Diane McFadden, BA, David O. Meltzer, MD, PhD

- Of 133 general internists, 79% believed that patients in general want to discuss their out-of-pocket costs prior to receiving a test or treatment and 90% said they should consider patients' out-of-pocket costs as they make clinical decisions
- However, 65% of these internists reported never discussing out-of-pocket costs with their patients
- 21% of the internists reported they were generally aware of how much their patients were spending out-of-pocket
- 20% were able to recall an instance when they wanted to discuss costs but didn't
 - The most common barriers included: insufficient time (67%), concern there was no viable solution to offer (19%), their own discomfort discussing costs (11%), and concerns of compromised quality of care (8%)

U.S. Internists' Perspectives on Discussing Cost of Care With Patients: Structured Interviews and a Survey

**Susan L. Perez, PhD, MPH; Arlene Weissman, PhD; Susan Read, PhD; Cynthia Daisy Smith, MD; Lisa Colello, MPA;
Doris Peter, PhD; and Wendy Nickel, MPH**

- Of 621 general internists, 75% reported frequently considering out-of-pocket costs when making clinical decisions, but only 50% reported having frequent discussions about these costs with their patients
- 84% reported having knowledge that any of their patients went without medical care in the past year due to cost
- 31% reported there were times in the past year when they wanted to discuss out-of-pocket costs with patients but did not do so
- Of 20 internists who were interviewed about cost conversations, themes included:
 - Patient's hesitancy to bring up cost due to: embarrassment and the hierarchical nature of healthcare
 - Clues for initiating a conversation including: "non-compliance," patient isn't improving as expected, patient provides clues to financial difficulty
 - Addressing cost sensitivity with a treatment plan including: discussing potential costs, discussing treatment alternatives, and being transparent about treatment trade offs



A Review of Cost Communication in Oncology: Patient Attitude, Provider Acceptance, and Outcome Assessment

Ya-Chen Tina Shih, PhD¹; and Chun-Ru Chien, MD, PhD^{2,3}

- 1 study reported that only 28% of oncologists felt comfortable discussing costs with patients
- 1 study found that 75% of oncologists considered it their responsibility to discuss out-of-pocket costs with their patients
- In 3 studies that asked physicians about the frequency of cost discussions, between 6% and 60% said they “always” or “frequently” discussed costs with patients
- 47% of physicians on average have had cost communications with their patients

Physician Consideration of Patients' Out-of-Pocket Costs in Making Common Clinical Decisions

Hoangmai H. Pham, MD, MPH; G. Caleb Alexander, MD, MS; Ann S. O'Malley, MD, MPH

- Survey of 6628 US physicians spending at least 20h per week on direct patient care (largely generalists)
- 78.2% reported regularly taking patients' out-of-pocket costs into account when prescribing generic over brand-name drugs (PCPs 85.3% vs medical specialists 74.5%, $P < 0.001$)
- 51.2% reported considering out-of-pocket costs in choosing inpatient vs outpatient care settings and 40.2% did so in selecting diagnostic tests

Responsibilities, Strategies, and Practice Factors in Clinical Cost Conversations: a US Physician Survey

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- Survey of 489 physicians from the AMA Physician Masterfile in 2017 compared to 2575 surveys from the Masterfile in 2012
- 32% reported the check potential out-of-pocket costs of new medications and 26% reported discussing out-of-pockets costs of treatments and medications most of the time
- When costs were discussed, physicians reported it resulted in a management change 56% of the time

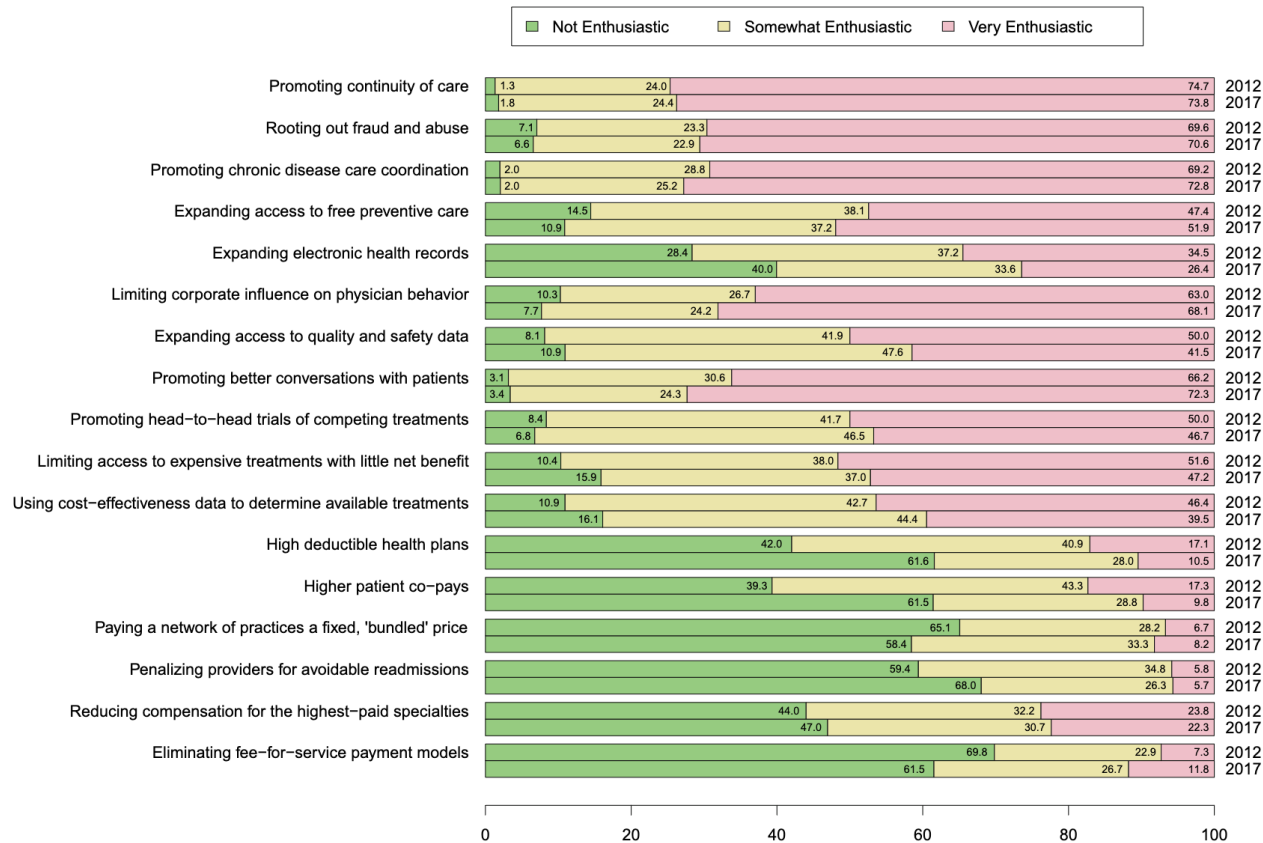


Figure 2 Physician enthusiasm for strategies in 2017 and 2012.

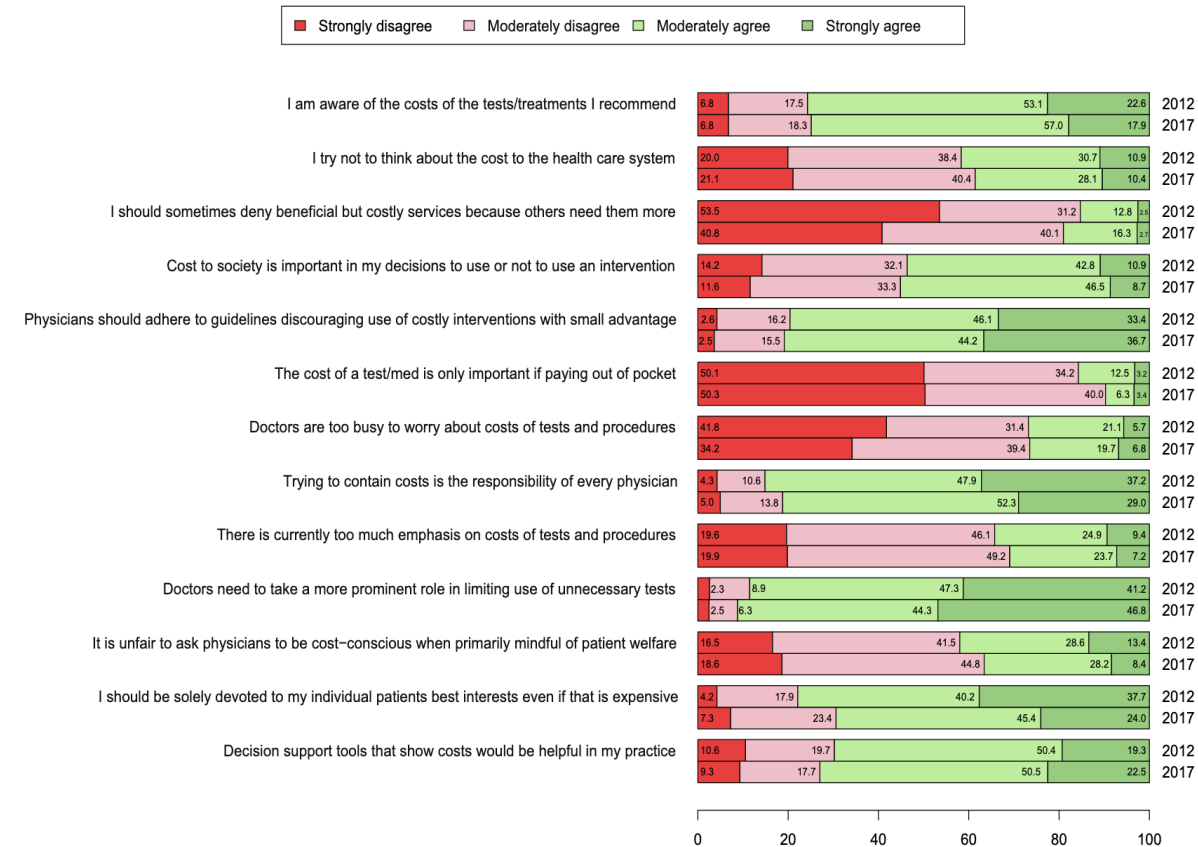


Figure 3 Cost-consciousness score in 2017 and 2012.