The obscurity of health care pricing undermines trust in medicine

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The chronic ambiguity surrounding how much health services will cost patients can undermine trust in physicians and health care organizations. But with the push for price transparency, it has become clear that answering the question, “How much will it cost?” is at times nearly impossible.

The November issue of AMA Journal of Ethics® (@JournalofEthics) investigates why price transparency matters clinically and ethically to physicians and other stakeholders in the U.S. health system.

The issue includes the following articles.

1. “How Might Patients and Physicians Use Transparent Health Care Prices to Guide Decisions and Improve Health Care Affordability?”
   These key steps are ones health sector stakeholders should take to help patients and clinicians use pricing information to inform health decision making.

2. “Informed Consent as a Means of Acknowledging and Avoiding Financial Toxicity as Iatrogenic Harm.”
   Negative health consequences from costly care are referred to as financial toxicity and should be included in informed consent discussions.


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3 “What Should U.S. Policymakers Learn From International Drug Pricing Transparency Strategies?”
This article analyzes differences in prescription drug pricing transparency practices among three Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development member nations.

4 “What Should 'Shopping' Look Like in Actual Practice?”
This article applies principlism to what a “shoppable service” model would demand of clinicians in practice.

Listen and learn

The journal’s November “Ethics Talk” podcast features a discussion with Mark Rukavina, a program director with the nonprofit advocacy organization Community Catalyst, on how consumer advocacy groups can help advance health justice and equity.

The November issue also features eight author-interview podcasts. Listen to previous episodes of the “Ethics Talk” podcast or subscribe in Apple Podcasts or other services.

Also, CME modules drawn from this month’s issue are collected at the AMA Ed Hub™ AMA Journal of Ethics webpage.

A look ahead

Upcoming issues of the journal will focus on stillness and solidarity as orientations to health care practice and professionalism, segregation in academic health centers, and child abuse and neglect. Sign up to receive email alerts when new issues are published.