

SECTION 3: OVERVIEW OF CATASTROPHIC CARE

Overview

This section describes the profile of catastrophic care patients, as well as the characteristics of catastrophic care, including diagnosis type, length of stay and geographic distribution of patients.

As discussed earlier, for purposes of this study, we have defined catastrophic care to be all discharges at or above each hospital's average cost plus three standard deviations. Our analyses reflect this definition.

Profile of Catastrophic Care Patients in Wyoming

Catastrophic care discharges are Wyoming hospitals' highest cost discharges and represent 12 percent of total costs. In general, catastrophic care patients are older than trauma care patients. The typical catastrophic care patient is over the age of 60 and Caucasian (Appendix G, Figure 3.1). Seventy-seven percent of catastrophic care patients are over the age of 50 (Appendix G, Figure 3.2), and 30 percent of trauma care patients are below the age of 20 as compared to only 2 percent of catastrophic care patients. Medicare is the primary payor for 56 percent of the catastrophic care patients.

Additionally, catastrophic care patients are more evenly distributed by gender as compared to the trauma care patients, with a slightly greater proportion of catastrophic care patients that are female (Appendix G, Figure 3.3).

The distribution of catastrophic care patients reflects the distribution of the general population by county. Fremont, Natrona and Laramie counties have the highest percent of catastrophic care patients with 11, 12 and 13 percent respectively (Appendix G, Exhibit 3.1). Out-of-state patients account for only 7 percent of catastrophic care patients, slightly lower than the percent of out-of-state trauma care patients (12 percent).

Because catastrophic care has been defined by cost in this analysis, a variation of diagnoses for catastrophic care patients is expected. The 1,543 catastrophic care patients are treated for approximately 650 different diagnoses. The most frequent diagnosis for catastrophic care patients is pneumonia (Appendix G, Figure 3.4). The diagnoses for catastrophic care patients greatly differ from the diagnoses for trauma care patients. Only four percent of trauma care patients are also catastrophic care patients. Catastrophic care patients have longer lengths of stay than trauma care patients. Most catastrophic care patients are in the hospital for more than two weeks (Appendix G, Figure 3.5).

Geographic Location of Trauma and Catastrophic Care Patients

Appendix G, Exhibit 3.1 shows the number of trauma and catastrophic care discharges by patient county of origin. While discharges are grouped by patient type, some discharges may be related to both catastrophic and trauma care, and therefore, included in both columns. The counties with the largest percentages of trauma care and catastrophic care patients are similar: Natrona, Sheridan, Fremont County, Sweetwater and Laramie Counties. Seven percent of catastrophic care patients are from out-of-state as compared to 12 percent of trauma care patients.

Summary

Unlike trauma care, catastrophic care patients are usually over the age of 69, and are more evenly distributed among males and females than trauma care. Hospital lengths of stay are longer for catastrophic care than for trauma care. While hospitals in Wyoming serve their own counties for catastrophic and trauma care, there are a few hospitals that have disproportionately large percentages of patients from outside the county where the hospital is located.