

POSTER ABSTRACTS

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Cost-Sharing and Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review

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Background: The use of cost-sharing to control healthcare expenditures is increasing but there is a lack of consensus about the impact on patient health outcomes.

Methods: We performed a systematic review of publications examining the impact of cost-sharing on patient health outcomes. We searched the Medline database for publications from 1966 through May 2002, and identified additional publications using the bibliographies of relevant publications, including reviews and commentaries. Two researchers independently reviewed all abstracts and titles, selected relevant publications, and read and reviewed selected publications using a fixed abstraction protocol. All studies had to have an analysis of effects on clinical patient outcomes, longitudinal patient level data, and either a randomized controlled trial design (RCT) or quasi-experimental design with concurrent controls (QE).

Results: Our initial literature search identified 2,329 total publications about cost-sharing; we selected and reviewed 239 potentially relevant publications. After data abstraction, we identified nine publications that examined the impact of cost-sharing on patient clinical outcomes and that had met our minimum inclusion criteria. All of the studies had fewer than 8000 subjects, and seven of the nine publications were from the same study, i.e. the RAND Health Insurance Experiment (HIE) conducted in the 1970's. The two other studies used a QE design, and were conducted in managed care, integrated delivery systems. Overall, four of the nine publications reported that cost-sharing results in deteriorated health outcomes, e.g. worse vision or blood pressure levels. All four of these were from the HIE, which also found no significant cost-sharing effects on several other health outcomes. The five other publications reported no significant negative impact of cost-sharing on health outcomes, although all had limited precision.

Conclusions: Despite the increasing use of cost-sharing and numerous publications evaluating potential effects, there are few rigorously controlled studies on cost-sharing and patient health outcomes. The existing studies all had relatively small sample sizes, which might have limited power to detect changes in health outcomes. These preliminary findings suggest a significant need for more research in this area.