



New Law Requires Urgent Care Clinics to Post Prices

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It's impossible to be a conscientious consumer of medical services if you don't know how much a procedure, an office visit or a lab test will cost. If you live in Florida, however, and are in need of urgent care, the mystery about costs is about to lift.

As reported on the St. Petersburg Times' [Tampa Bay.com](http://TampaBay.com), a new health care transparency law requires urgent care clinics to post prices on their 50 most frequently provided services. The price of failure to do so? \$1,000 per day until they comply.

As patients pay an ever greater share of their health costs, budgeting--or even self-rationing, in some cases--becomes a reality. But doctors opposed to posting prices say that health care pricing is too complex for such simple translation. Myriad insurance company billing codes and several ways to pay (cash, private insurance, government programs) will lead to information, they say, that's more misleading than informative.

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The new law says posted prices apply only to patients who use credit cards or pay cash for services, not those with insurance. And it applies to urgent-care clinics, but not facilities such as hospital emergency rooms. Individual primary care physicians aren't required to post prices, but if they do so voluntarily, they are excused from paying license fees and fulfill continuing medical education requirements for a certain period.

Consumer and business groups including Florida Public Interest Research Group and Associated Industries of Florida support the legislation.

Doctors ... not so much. They're unclear about the requirements and which types of practices must comply. Apart from urgent care centers, what about clinics that accept walk-in patients? They're not wild about the cash/credit-only provision, because most patients at many clinics have some insurance coverage, and posted prices might drive away people who really need care. The continuing education enticement isn't particularly alluring, they say, because many physicians must meet course requirements to remain board certified.

But in an industry long overdue for transparency, this is a step in the right direction.

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