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Gunn: PricePoint website offers guide to hospital pricing

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Sticker shock -- we all face it at one time or another. Whether it's the cost of a home, an automobile or even a stay in the hospital, it's easy to be taken aback by the prices we pay. In an effort to help patient consumers make better informed decisions about their own care, KershawHealth is participating in PricePoint, the South Carolina Hospital Association's (SCHA) new website designed to clarify hospital pricing in our state.

The site includes information about types and volumes of various services provided by KershawHealth and other South Carolina hospitals and the charges associated with those services. It also provides links where patient consumers can learn more about the quality of care provided by our hospitals and our continuing efforts to improve care -- because quality is a critical factor in any decision regarding your health.

Obviously, the object of PricePoint is just that: price. But it's important to remember that what hospitals charge and what most patients and insurers pay are completely different. While hospitals would prefer to have a single price which is paid by all, it's not how our healthcare system works. Hospital charges are very much like the sticker price on a car or the "manufacturer's suggested retail price" of an item. They're a place to start, but they're not what consumers and insurers usually end up paying.

Why? Because of the large number of individuals private insurance companies cover, they typically negotiate significant discounts on charges by

hospitals and other healthcare providers. It is much the same way a fleet operator purchasing 25 delivery trucks would pay far less than a small business purchasing a single truck or two. While private insurance carriers negotiate discounts for the care their subscribers need, government sponsored insurers, such as Medicare and Medicaid, on the other hand, set their own reimbursement rates for patient care. These payment rates are usually fixed with no regard to the price a hospital or provider sets. We recognize all this can be complicated, but at KershawHealth, we are blessed with talented people who can help you understand what all this means to you when you need care. And now that we are participating in PricePoint, you will have another tool to help better understand where you might be able to get the best value for your healthcare dollars.

PricePoint is not perfect, but it's a great start to help South Carolinians understand healthcare prices, and at KershawHealth, we support this effort. We want you to understand more about the high-value healthcare we deliver each day. I encourage you to take some time to check out the site and SCHA's new website, as well. You can find both at www.scha.org.

<http://www.chronicle-independent.com/section/49/article/39163/>