

Medical pricing website proposed in New Mexico

Barry Massey / Associated Press

SANTA FE. — New Mexico could help make health care more affordable by establishing a website to provide consumers with information about the cost of medical procedures and quality of care at hospitals, according to a report by an independent think tank.

Think New Mexico plans to push for the proposal when the Legislature meets next year for a 60-day session.

“Today, New Mexicans can find more information about the price and quality of a household appliance than we can about a common surgical procedure,” Fred Nathan, the think tank’s executive director, said in a statement.

The report said 13 states, including Arizona and Colorado, have web sites allowing consumers and employers to make their health care decisions by comparing prices and quality offered by providers.

Consumers increasingly need pricing information, the report said, because they’re being forced to pay more out-of-pocket expenses in their health insurance plans.

Enrique Knell, a spokesman for Gov. Susana Martinez, said the “consumer friendly health care web portal is an interesting concept for further discussion,” while Todd Sandman, chief strategy officer of Presbyterian Healthcare Services, said it makes sense to provide more information to consumers.

“There is a lot of willingness in the provider community to work with proponents of more transparency to figure out how we would do it and what would be useful to patients,” Sandman said in a telephone interview.

The health care provider, which offers insurance and operates a network of hospitals and clinics, hasn’t endorsed any of the think tank’s specific proposals and just received a copy of the report, he said.

The think tank also recommended that the state ban health care price discrimination by requiring hospitals to charge each of their patients the same price for the same medical service. Prices could still vary from hospital to hospital. Currently, patients in the same hospital may pay different prices for the same procedure.

Sandman said health care pricing and reimbursements are critical issues and the report will help frame the debate in the Legislature.

About half of New Mexicans receive care through Medicare and Medicaid, and the report said the government’s payment rates typically are below the cost of treatments by hospitals and other providers.

Sandman said providers have to “seek prices from the commercial market to offset the low reimbursement” by the government’s medical care programs.

The think tank, based in Santa Fe, has a successful track record in the Legislature and was a leading advocate of constitutional amendments adopted by voters in 2012 to overhaul the state’s utility and insurance regulatory agency.



Online:

Think New Mexico: www.thinknewmexico.org

Colorado medical pricing web site: <https://www.comedprice.org>