

Title: **Bill would inform health consumers**

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Editorial

Bill would inform health consumers

There was once a time when comparison shopping meant driving to stores all over town to check on the price and quality of whatever it was you wanted to buy. The Internet has changed all that.

Now we can go online and find the best available deals, not only in the community where we live, but anywhere in the world.

Unfortunately, there is one critical area where consumers are still in the dark, and that's health care. For New Mexicans especially, that lack of knowledge can come at a hefty price. A 2014 study by the Commonwealth Fund ranked our state last in the nation for health-care affordability and access.

A bill now working its way through the New Mexico Senate would arm health-care consumers with the knowledge they need to make better informed decisions.

Senate Bill 474 would take advantage of the state's existing Sunshine Portal, which provides easy access to things like state contracts and salaries. It would add to the portal cost and quality information on common medical pro-

cedures at the state's hospitals.

The state Department of Health already collects much of that data, but is prohibited by law from releasing information about specific hospitals.

The bill also would also establish an advisory committee to assist the Department of Health in the collection and distribution of data.

A second bill, SB 323, has also been introduced with the backing of hospital administrators, but it lacks specifics as to what data would be required to be made public. That bill would be a step in the right direction, but SB 474 is more comprehensive.

A recent story by New Mexico In Depth reports that the average New Mexican spends 17 cents for every dollar earned on health care, and costs are continuing to go up. There is no other sector of our

economy in which consumers spend so much of their income, with so little information to help them make wise purchasing decisions.

Making health care costs more transparent has been proven in other states to help bring those costs down. Think New Mexico, the public-policy group advocating for the health-care transparency bill, quotes a 2013 University of Chicago study that found costs for common elective procedures were 7 percent lower in states that have transparency laws.

Cost isn't the only factor consumers need when choosing a health-care provider. Quality of care is just as important, and would also be included under this bill.

A website that provides current, accurate information would be a huge benefit to health-care consumers throughout the state.