

## Largest Expenditure for Back Pain Care: Narcotics!

Editorial Staff

The December 2000 issue of The Back Letter presented an article on a study of treatment costs for low back pain.<sup>1</sup> The study included 126,186 members of a "Pittsburgh area health care system" (UPMC), four percent of whom experienced low back pain in the first six months of 1999.

The 4,764 members with low back pain generated the following claims and expenses:

Expenditure	Number of Claims	Cost
Narcotics	7,49	\$630,000
In-Patient Admissions	78	\$318,500
MRIs & CT Scans	1,000	\$348,200*
Surgery	101	\$226,000
NSAIDs	4,498	\$141,000
Pain X-Rays	2,279	\$105,000
Physical Therapy	3,787	\$ 90,042

\* (\$301,500 & \$46,700 respectively)

Much to the authors' surprise, narcotics topped the list for expenditures and claims, with an average of one and one-half claims per person at an average of \$84 per claim.

In-patient admissions were second at an average of \$4,083 for an average 3.4 days of hospitalization (\$1,200 per day).

The average cost of surgery was \$2,238, not including the surgeon's professional fees.

Members who received physical therapy averaged 10 visits each at an average of \$23.77 per claim.

This study should wake up many other health care plans that, like the UPMC health plan, probably don't realize the extent of narcotics being prescribed by medical providers. This awareness should make chiropractic all the more attractive to HMOs, as its care is more cost-effective and has much fewer risks.

### Reference

1. Ursiny J, et al. Managing the costs of care for low back pain: experience within a large healthcare delivery system, presented at the annual meeting, American College of Rheumatology, Philadelphia, 2000. Not yet published.

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