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An economic benefit analysis of telephonic nurse triage service

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Telephone nurse lines help callers select the most appropriate site/level of care for acute conditions. The study objective was to determine whether compliance with nurse recommendations were associated with lower average health care expenditures and to identify employer characteristics associated with achieving higher than average savings. Telephone calls placed between 1/1/2012 to 12/31/2012 by commercial health plan members who worked for large employers were identified. Callers' pre-intent and nurse recommendation regarding site/level of care were captured and compliance was determined using medical claims during a 30 day post-call observation period and was based on adherence to nurse recommendations. After regression-based adjustment, average medical expenditures were compared between compliers and non-compliers. A logistic regression analysis identified employer characteristics positively associated with achieving higher than average savings. 132,509 calls were identified for study inclusion. Nurse recommendations were that 31.0% of the callers seek a higher level of care than mentioned at the start of the call, 24.9% use a lower level of care and 44.1% pursue their originally intended level of care. Overall, 56.8% of callers were compliant with nurse recommendations. On average expenditures was \$328 lower among compliant callers. Employer characteristics associated with greater savings included having a low employee to dependent ratio, a headquarters in the Western region of the US, a low prospective health risk score and participation by the employer in a targeted communication campaign. Compliance with Nurse Line triage recommendations results in lower average health care expenditures and several characteristics were positively associated with achieving higher savings.

Biography

Stephen Hartley is the Senior Director of Analytics for the Population Health Management products at Optum. He has more than 20 years of experience in the health care industry. Currently, he and his team of research and data analysts are responsible for development and execution of an analytic agenda to assist in product research, design, execution and evaluation for Optum Population Health Management products. Prior to joining Optum, he has worked in Reporting, Analytics and Data Management for SHPS, Principal Financial Group and J F Molloy & Associates. He holds a BS in Mathematics & Actuarial Science from Butler University.

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