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## New Web sites help people find the best values in health care

By GETAHN WARD

Consumers who want to compare costs of health-care services among hospitals continue to get more tools, including from a pair of Nashville-area companies.

On Tuesday, a firm called Data Advantage rolled out what it calls a "hospital value index" for use by consumers, employers and others.

Nashville General Hospital at Meharry, Northcrest Medical Center in Springfield, the north campus of Riverview Regional Medical Center in Carthage, Tenn., as well as Skyline Medical Center and Saint Thomas Hospital, both in Nashville, are listed as offering the best values in the metro area.

The study considered affordability, efficiency, quality, patient satisfaction and local perception to compile the index.

Separately, change:healthcare — a startup — recently re-launched its cost ratings tool on the Web called Medstimate. It uses claims data showing the negotiated prices that providers accept, plus other patient-submitted information, to create the free service.

Cost estimates for an admitted sufferer of a stroke adjusted for severity of illness range from \$23,502 at Vanderbilt University Medical Center to \$10,548 at Saint Thomas, the Web site says.

### Web plays a larger role

The big questions about these and other comparison sites has been: how much do consumers care about overall costs, and are they likely to go shopping for medical services the same way they shop for airline tickets?

Historically, consumers have relied on recommendations from doctors and insurers when they choose care.

Today, though, more people are likely to use tools (including the Internet) to look up information on quality of care or patient satisfaction ratings, said John Morrow, senior adviser to Data Advantage.

Robert Hendrick, change:healthcare's chief operating officer, attributes the shift to more health-care costs being passed on to consumers through higher co-pays, steeper deductibles and the requirement to pay a percentage of the cost of services rather than a flat co-pay.

Out-of-pocket costs ranked second only to quality data, such as mortality or complication rates in selecting hospitals, according to survey of 755 respondents by The Advisory Board Co., in Washington, D.C. Costs were a bigger factor than satisfaction, physician recommendations and distance.

Craig Becker, president of the Tennessee Hospital Association, said he's wary of comparisons, depending on who sponsors a study and how the data is gathered.

"Consumers don't care how much hospitals get paid by their insurance companies," Becker added. "They want to know how much it's going to cost me out-of-pocket."

Change:healthcare and Data Advantage insist their research isn't tarnished by conflicts of interest.

"All we've done is aggregate data that the hospitals report themselves and compile a composite score," said Hal Andrews, chief executive of Data Advantage.

Go to [hospitalvalueindex.com](http://hospitalvalueindex.com) for Data Advantage's Hospital Value Index, and go to [www.changehealthcare.com](http://www.changehealthcare.com) to review change:healthcare's consumer tools.

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