Medical Debt 101: How to Help

heal the debt

BWICA

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Agenda

- Hospital Financial Assistance
  - Eligibility
  - What it doesn’t cover
- Applying through Hospital
- Applying Through Dollar For
- Potential Challenges
- Other Resources

Financial Assistance Programs

- Hospital Financial Assistance for Patients.
  - Since 2006
  - Expanded in 2024
- Also called charity care, indigent care program, financial aid, bill forgiveness
- Best kept secret!
  - Several surveys show that almost 2/3 of the patients were unaware that their hospitals had financial assistance programs
- Next section—
  - Eligibility and how to apply in NYC
  - How to use Dollar For
  - How to advocate for yourself or others

Financial Assistance Policies

- Every NY hospital required to have one and every non profit nationally
- Must be posted on their website in its entirety and there must be short summary of the requirements
- Multiple languages
- Application form provided—Standard simplified form in NY
- https://www.mountsinai.org/files/MSHealth/Assets/HS/About/Financial%20Aid/UHFAA-English.pdf
- Supposed to be well publicized

Eligibility—broader than you think!

- NY has specific requirements—400% FPL required eligibility floor
- Don’t have to be uninsured! NY law protects underinsured if your insurance has been exhausted
- Catastrophic cost—if your medical costs exceed 10% of income, you are eligible regardless of income
- Examples:
    - NYP—up to $90,000 individual/$187,200 family of 4 income, you can get a discount (600%FPL)
    - NYU—100% discount up to 600% FPL and lower discounts up to 800% FPL
    - H +H—up to 500%FPL
    - Mt Sinai—up to 400% FPL
    - Maimonides/Brooklyn Hospital—still says 300% FPL on some links

Details from law:

https://www.health.ny.gov/facilities/hospital/financial_assist/docs/25-04_hospital_financial_assistance.pdf

Income Level	Payment
Below 200% FPL	Waive all charges
200% - 300% FPL	Uninsured patients: Sliding scale up to 10% of the amount that would have been paid for the service(s) by Medicaid. Underinsured patients: Up to a maximum of 10% of the amount that would have been paid pursuant to such patient's insurance cost sharing.
301% - 400% FPL	Uninsured patients: Sliding scale up to 20% of the amount that would have been paid for the service(s) by Medicaid Underinsured patients: Up to a maximum of 20% of the amount that would have been paid pursuant to such patient's insurance cost sharing.

The process

- Use Dollar For’s tool to see if a bill might be eligible for financial assistance
- If you are eligible and fill out their form to apply, the info will be automatically uploaded and submitted to the hospital

  https://dollarfor.org/brooklyn
- If you prefer to do on your own, can look at the website of the hospital-
  - Google financial assistance & hospital name e.g https://www.nyp.org/pay-my-bill
  - Look at the summary policy first and see if outstanding bill might qualify
  - Note the financial counsellors’ phone number and call if you need help—if you can’t find, search patient representative
- Once an application submitted, you are not required to pay any bill until a determination is made (usually 30 days)
- Can submit at any time during billing and collection process
- Can appeal any decision

Dollar For Process

- Dollar For usually submits an application within 4 weeks of submitting your documents
- Always highlight any special, personal circumstances—recent job loss, family illness etc.
- After your application is submitted, the hospital will follow up with you—not Dollar For
- Dollar For will send you texts to check on what has happened
  - Stay in touch with them—will improve your chances of getting help!
- They will provide follow up coaching about handling other medical bills like the out of network doctors or physician practices not covered by hospital policy
- This service is free of charge!

Potential Snags/Tips

- Proof of income
  - Standard proofs are pay stubs, letter from an employer, 1040
  - NY has a self attestation form that some hospitals will accept

    https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/publications/docs/adm/10adm-5att5.pdf
  - **In NY, cannot take assets into account**
- Start with the hospital bill
  - Once a person has been approved at the hospital level, can call the doctor practices (anesthesiology/radiology)
  - Shows that income has been verified by their trusted partner
  - Call other providers and tell them you are eligible for Hospital Financial Assistance
- Facilities covered by the hospital policy can be confusing (consolidation)
  - Call any hospital financial counsellor if can't figure it out
- Tracking the status of your application for aid can be a mystery
  - If looking at MyChart, a bill can disappear
  - Ask the financial office what has happened
  - Might get no feedback whatsoever

Some troublespots

- Payment plans
  - Do not accept before applying for hospital financial assistance.
  - If not eligible for financial assistance, payment plans can be a good alternative. Some are no interest, or low interest.
- Collection agencies
  - In New York, not allowed to **sell** debt to a collection agency or third party, unless the intention is to abolish the debt. (like Undue Medical Debt)
  - But hospitals contract with collection agencies to collect the money for them.
  - Sometimes very old accounts can show up.
- Medical credit cards—Very problematic!
  - Deferred interest—average rate after initial period is 20-30%
  - Offered in some medical offices
  - NY has some protections—provider can't fill the application out on own
- Paying with any credit card—in NY, won't be considered medical debt so not protected from credit reporting. Nationally, anything less than $500 won't be reported to a credit agency

What Financial Assistance Cannot Cover

- Non hospital affiliated care
- Non medically necessary care—e.g. cosmetic
- Not all hospitals will cover co-pays and deductibles
- Insurance issues
- Prescriptions—financial assistance from drug companies/etc.
- Labs—although may be done in hospital and covered
- Dental bills
- Veterinary bills
- Some doctors who may have treated in the hospital and either are not hospital staff or out of network
- Bills older than 240 days (8 months) not required to be eligible—policies vary

Other rights and resources

- NY has strong rights for health care insurance consumers
  - The health care services you need
  - Emergency services in a hospital with no charge beyond in-network co payment, coinsurance or deductible
  - Appeal rights from insurance denials
  - Protection from “surprise bills” (which can be as old as one year)
- For a full list:
- https://www.dfs.ny.gov/consumers/health_insurance/your_rights_as_a_health_insurance_consumer
- For Help:
  - **Community Health Advocates (888) 614-5400**
    - **communityhealthadvocates.org**
  - **Medicare Rights Center (800) 333-4114**
    - **www.medicarerights.org**

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To schedule a virtual appointment, email healthedebt@gmail.com or Call 917-740-6052