



## For Immediate Release

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### Angie's List and Healthcare Blue Book Partner to Help Consumers Save Money on Doctor Bills

**September 10, 2010. Indianapolis, IN** After months of cracking open the secret that consumers can negotiate their medical bills, [Angie's List](#) and [Healthcare Blue Book](#) today launched a service designed to help patients shop around for the best price before they even agree to treatment and incur those bills.

"So many of us overpay for health care for two reasons: medical billing is too complicated to figure out and we're so used to not having any control over price, that we don't even ask about it," said Angie Hicks, founder of Angie's List, the nation's premier provider of [consumer reviews](#) on local [doctors](#), [dentists](#) and service companies. "But you can save hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars with just a little bit of effort and still get high quality care."

A majority of the Angie's List members (85 percent) responding to a nationwide online poll in July said health care providers should publish their prices, and 61 percent would happily shop around if only they knew the prices area providers charged. Only 25 percent of respondents said they ask about pricing before agreeing to treatment.

"The Healthcare Blue Book takes the mystery out of health care pricing," said [Dr. Jeffrey Rice](#), founder of the [Healthcare Blue Book](#). "To get fair prices, patients must look up the accepted, average local prices and then make sure their provider agrees to that price before they get care."

Consumers can sometimes successfully negotiate prices down once they've been billed. But Rice cautions, "It is often too late to get a fair price if you try to negotiate after you already received the care at an overpriced provider."

Starting today on [Angieslist.com](#), members can access Healthcare Blue Book's local pricing information on visits ranging from ordinary pediatrician visits to complicated surgeries. Blue Book will also walk consumers through the negotiation process, and explain exactly what is required to get a fair price.

While the new tool is simple, Hicks and Rice said consumers may have a difficult time adjusting to this new way of looking at health care. Many consumers are savvy about price shopping for big ticket items like houses and cars, and smaller items like household products, but medical pricing has not traditionally been considered something to haggle over.

That will change, Hicks and Rice predict, once consumers realize, how big the price discrepancies can be. For example:

- In Washington, D.C., prices for an MRI of a right knee without contrast at five imaging centers ranged from \$400 to \$1504. The Healthcare Blue Book fair price: \$912.
- An MRI of the abdomen at three Atlanta imaging labs with and without contrast ranged from \$1,190 to \$2,543, if payment was cash. The Healthcare Blue Book fair price: \$836.
- Cost for an MRI of the lumbar spine with contrast ranged from \$500 to \$2,661 among eight Chicago hospitals and imaging centers. The Healthcare Blue Book fair price: \$522.

In a May 2010 nationwide member poll, Angie's List found that 57 percent of respondents have never negotiated a medical bill. Nearly 25 percent of them didn't even know they had that option.

Hicks and Rice cautioned consumers from putting too much emphasis on price when it comes to medical care. Finding health care providers who meet your specific needs and have all the necessary licensing and training is paramount. With the Angie's List and Healthcare Blue Book partnership, all that information is easily available in one location.

Patients with insurance should make sure they find in-network providers that charge fair rates. Patients without insurance are likely to be charged the highest fees. They particularly need to ask about prices and get agreement up front, Rice and Hicks said.

#### **Angie's List and Healthcare Blue Book's Tips on Negotiating Your Medical Bill:**

1. **Know what you're up against:** Before you agree to a course of treatment, research what you need done, get information on the provider you've chosen and the local rate for that service on Healthcare Blue Book, so you know if the rates your doctor suggests are in line with them.
2. **Ask for a discount.** Cash (or immediate payment) is king in a medical facility, just as it is with retailers and service companies. Ask if there's a discount for upfront payment or a no-interest payment plan. Be sure to follow all applicable health insurance rules.
3. **Get quotes in writing:** If you are price shopping before you have a procedure done, get a signature, name and title to go along with the price quoted.
4. **Cover every doctor in the room and the cost of the facility where treatment is given:** When getting prices, be sure you cover all fees associated with your procedure, rather than just the surgical costs. (i.e. anesthesiologist, radiologist, facility fee, laboratory costs, etc.)

5. **Be polite:** Don't be overly aggressive in seeking a discount. If you cannot afford what you need done, tell your provider. Some medical practices will alert you to payment options, but some may not be actively promoting them. Start with the office clerk you'd normally check out with, but don't be afraid to ask for a billing manager if you don't feel like you're getting a full answer.
6. **Review all the paperwork:** If a bill seems out of line, ask about it. Check around to determine if the bill is in line with what other facilities charge. Call the billing department armed with your information and ask for the lower charge.
7. **Call in expert help:** Medical billing is so complex that it's spawned a new industry of professional bill reviewers, sometimes called medical billing advocates. These specialists are trained to look for incorrect billing codes and duplicate charges. Check credentials before you hire, though. Experts say advocates average recovery of 17 to 49 percent and charge an average contingency fee of about 30 percent. Some charge flat fees, as well.

1,237 Angie's List members responded to the May online poll. 1,015 Angie's List members responded to the July online poll.

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### About Angie's List

Angie's List collects [consumer reviews](#) on local contractors and doctors in more than 500 service categories. Currently, more than 1 million consumers across the U.S. and Canada rely on Angie's List to help them make the best hiring decisions. Members get unlimited access to local ratings via Internet or phone, exclusive discounts, the [Angie's List magazine](#) and help from the Angie's List complaint resolution service. Take a [quick tour](#) of Angie's List and view the latest Angie's List [news](#)

### About Healthcare Blue Book

[Healthcarebluebook.com](#), headquartered in Nashville, TN, is a healthcare pricing tool that helps consumers and companies determine what fair prices are for healthcare services and treatments in their markets. The [www.healthcarebluebook.com](#) web site can be customized to employers' needs by offering information that allows employees to identify lower cost and high quality providers within their existing employer-sponsored health plan.