

Testing the waters for GeSY: Patients' opinion of cost-sharing arrangements in the public health care system in Cyprus

Executive Summary

User charges constitute a common practice for most health policy makers, and are mainly used to discourage unnecessary demand and to generate extra revenues. Cyprus joined the group of countries with cost-sharing arrangements in August 2013, when user charges were imposed for some outpatient services. The objective of this study was to investigate Cypriot patients' knowledge and understanding of a number of different co-payment aspects, to lead to useful policy considerations and recommendations for the future. A cross-sectional study was carried out, with a convenient sample of 885 patients who were beneficiaries of the public system, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The main results from multivariate logistic regression analysis indicate that a) lower income was associated with increased rates of those who judged the charges to be high or very high and of those who borrowed to pay the charges, b) as educational level dropped, a higher percentage considered the charges to be high or very high, and c) being male, being older and having a higher educational level were associated with increased percentages of those who agree that charges should be made for all health services. The experience of introducing co-payments in the healthcare system in Cyprus is valuable, and will be very useful for the upcoming implementation of the new General Healthcare Scheme (GeSY) that is likely to be accompanied by higher charges for patients. In this case it is apparent that patients' opinions need to be considered, so as to lead to smarter planning, with evidenced based exceptions for certain vulnerable groups, and caps per month and user or family so as to avoid catastrophic and impoverishing effects.