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The economics of clinical genetics services. IV. Financial impact of outpatient genetic services on an academic institution.

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Abstract

Those clinical genetic services that do not involve laboratory tests or procedures--i.e., the "cognitive" services such as diagnosis, management, and counseling--are labor-intensive, time-consuming, and not self-supporting. However, as a result of an evaluation at a genetics clinics, a patient will often receive other services at the same medical center. The full economic impact of the genetics clinic may be underappreciated. Therefore, at one medical center we examined (a) three settings that delivered genetics services and (b) two specialty clinics providing services to children with genetics conditions; and we calculated charges and payments for an unselected, consecutive group of outpatients. The results showed that cognitive genetics services accounted for a variable, but generally low, percentage of both the professional (generally physicians') and total charges accumulated by patients as a consequence of their visit to the genetics clinic. With laboratory and procedural charges included, patients seen in general genetics clinics (or their insurance plans) paid up to three times as much to the medical center and to its health professionals as to the genetics professional. These data confirm that clinical genetics services, while not generating enough income to cover their own costs, bring considerable revenue to the medical center. This fact alone should prove useful to the director of clinical genetics programs when they are negotiating finances with institutional administrators.

Full text

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