



December 16, 2014  
The New York Times  
620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

Re: "The Odd Math of Medical Tests: One Scan, Two Prices, Both High," 12/15/2014

To the Editor:

Echocardiography is a valuable front-line tool for the diagnosis and management of cardiovascular disease. This article quotes the charges for this essential diagnostic test while failing to clarify that the charges cited are almost never paid by either payers or patients. In fact, Medicare spending for echocardiography under the Physician Fee Schedule was lower in 2011 than it was in 2001. Moreover, it is well-known that charges for all health services vary substantially from one institution to another: This is not unique to echocardiography.

We would also like to point out that echocardiography utilization is not increasing rampantly, as suggested. Utilization of echocardiograms performed on Medicare patients began leveling off after 2008 and actually declined by over 10% from 2010-2012.

The article refers to the echocardiogram as a "simple test." This is, in itself, a simplification of the state of the technology. Some echocardiographic machines are extremely sophisticated with advanced technology to assess left ventricle and valvular heart disease unlike any other available medical technology.

Our Society is working to ensure appropriate use of all health services, including echocardiography. Echocardiography is widely recognized as a highly valuable tool for the clinician and this article's singular focus on charges is not representative of its contributions to our patients' care.

Sincerely,

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*President, MedStar Health Research Institute*  
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