



## The Mammoth Cost of MRIs

The average cost for an MRI in the US is \$1,119.<sup>1</sup> Around 40 million MRI scans are performed each year in the US.<sup>2</sup> This accounts for a price tag of nearly \$50 billion.<sup>2</sup> Freestanding imaging centers are likely to cost a third of the network rate when compared to a hospital (\$504 compared to \$1,567) which can impact patient choice.<sup>2</sup>

While paying significantly less sounds appealing, it may be too good to be true. Lower prices for imaging exams do not directly relate to a better deal or even the ability of the lower priced scan to provide a diagnosis.<sup>3</sup> In fact, in both the Medicare and Private Insurance markets, reimbursement rates are driven by multiple factors, with two major exceptions: the quality of care and patient outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

## Cost Savings ≠ Quality Care

There are several reasons why cost savings don't equate to quality care where MRIs are concerned. Prices are more readily available on websites for free-standing imaging centers and not on hospital websites which can drive a patient's decision making. By choosing a lower cost option, patients may unknowingly sacrifice quality in several ways.<sup>3,5</sup>

Open MRIs are more frequently found at stand-alone imaging centers. While open MRIs are not inherently bad and can afford more patient comfort, they have a poorer image quality due to their weaker magnet strength.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, certain pathologies cannot be diagnosed with an open MRI machine.

Patients and insurance companies alike may seek out independent imaging centers in hopes of saving a little up front. Unfortunately, this process can be rendered null when it turns out that a repeat scan is needed because the first scan was not of diagnostic quality. You also inherit a radiologist that reads for the imaging center, who is likely not fellowship trained and subspecialized. Fellowship trained, subspecialized radiologists are more likely to work at academic hospitals and aren't necessarily affiliated with stand-alone imaging centers.<sup>7</sup> This may affect patient care.

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