Wouldn’t life be better if getting the health care you need—and knowing how much it is going to cost—were as easy as shopping at your favorite store?

Instead, you see this doctor or that doctor and he or she recommends a diagnostic or preventive procedure. She hands you a business card or refers you to the desk staff, where the receptionist tells you someone will call you to set up the appointment. As you absorb the news that you have to have a procedure at all, your mind begins spinning with dozens of questions, namely, “How much is this going to cost me?”

If your experience is like most, you are whisked to the desk staff and promptly out the door before you can utter anything more than your phone number and preference of appointment dates. And even if you had the time, you probably don’t even really feel comfortable talking to your doctor about cost—at least most patients don’t. A 2015 study found that although 80 percent of patients said they would talk to their doctor about costs, 72 percent have never broached the subject with their doctors.

There are a few things you need to know that could save you a lot of money on your health care. It’s time to start talking about how much your health care costs, and you should know that you have options outside of your doctor’s referral.

The Hidden System of Health Care Referrals
In December 2018, The Wall Street Journal, published an article that looked into the “hidden system that explains how your doctor makes referrals,” describing the almost monopolistic culture of modern hospital systems. These hospital groups own everything from the hospital to the practice where your primary care doctor is employed. Doctors inside these systems face consequences when word spreads to higher-ups that they referred patients outside the system. Losing referrals is called “leakage,” and it earns some doctors more than just a slap on the wrist, if they fail to bring internal referral numbers up to par.

WSJ reviewed documents and interviewed current and former doctors, lawyers, and hospital executives of various hospital health systems throughout the country. They found that physicians were under intense pressure to keep their patients within the system—even if the physician felt that an outside facility might be in the best interest of the patient. The healthcare industry is a $3.5 trillion business and patients are unwittingly burdened with the costs.

“It’s time to start talking about how much your health care costs and knowing that you have options.”
Shopping for Health Care: Transparent Pricing, Quality Care

The culture of keeping mum about health care costs is over. Patients, doctors, and health care businesses are evolving, but in the midst of the evolution, patients (ahem, you) have to stand up for what is in their best interest.

If you are like most Americans, you want to know your options: What am I getting and how much is it going to cost me?

You can shop for health care. You can know what you are getting. You can know how much it is going to cost you, all before you book an appointment.

When your doctor tells you that you need a procedure, like a colonoscopy, and makes a referral, don’t pull out your smartphone and mark the date on your calendar right away. Instead, ask why your doctor prefers the facility and request an estimate of costs. Take that information, go home and do a little research.

Websites like Healthcare Bluebook and Medicare.gov Procedure Price Lookup, for Medicare patients, can give you the national average cost for common procedures, often comparing hospital rates against independent facilities, like ambulatory surgery centers (ASC). In many cases, procedures at an independent ASC are at least 40 percent lower than the hospital.

If you’re insured, preventive procedures are often covered at 100 percent at most independent ASCs, while diagnostic procedures are a fraction of the cost charged by hospitals.

You can choose where you have your procedure, just like you can choose your doctor. You don’t have to use the facility, lab or specialist your doctor recommends, even if it seems implied. You can find out costs at various facilities and discover what to expect during the experience by going online or making a few simple phone calls.

Independent ASCs often offer lower costs along with amenities and touchpoints, such as pricing transparency, curbside drop-off and pick-up, shorter wait times, top-ranked industry accreditations and certifications for safety and quality.

Your primary care doctor (or any doctor, for that matter) may refer you to an affiliated hospital, but ultimately you are in control of where you get your health care. You can ask why your doctor recommends a certain lab, specialist or facility, even if he or she touts the recommendation as the best, do a little homework and make sure it is the best choice for you.

North Texas Endoscopy Centers is an independent ASC, specializing in GI care and endoscopic procedures, in North Texas. North Texas Endoscopy Centers offer a seamless patient experience from scheduling to discharge, including pre-appointment confirmations, procedure preparation reminders, friendly staff, short wait and procedure times, curbside drop-off and pick-up and convenient parking.

Every gastroenterologist is fellowship-trained, exceeding national benchmarks for quality of procedure performance, and supported by an expert staff that specializes in endoscopic care. North Texas Endoscopy Centers are CMS certified and AAAHC accredited, meaning the staff and facility must pass rigorous inspections to ensure that the highest level of safety and quality standards are upheld. Choosing an independent ASC, is more than just a cost-effective option, it is top-quality care that you and your physician can trust.

Source: Healthcare Bluebook, 2018

Commonly prescribed procedures, national cash-based averages at an Ambulatory Surgery Center vs. Hospital Outpatient Department. Procedures at an ASC are typically 40 percent less than the same procedure at an HOPD.
THE DIET SERIES

New research has uncovered strong evidence that healthy weight management is key to reducing the risk of colon cancer in patients under the age of 55. The recent uptick in colorectal cancer cases among 20-49 year olds is theorized to be linked to the increasing rates of obesity observed in young people over the last two decades. To help you lower your risk of disease, such as colorectal cancer, North Texas Endoscopy Centers is featuring a collection of articles on popular diets. The goal is to help you understand your options for eating well, losing weight, maintaining a healthy weight, and reducing your risk of disease. Not every diet is “the best” for every person. You must select a diet that fits your budget and your lifestyle while helping you achieve and maintain your health goals.

THE WHOLE30 DIET

Whole30 is a 30-day “nutrition reset, designed to help you put an end to unhealthy cravings and habits, restore a healthy metabolism, heal your digestive tract, and balance your immune system.” The idea behind the diet is that certain food groups may be negatively affecting your health. After cutting the potentially harmful food groups from your diet completely for 30 days, you can reintroduce each one at a time back into your diet, looking for side effects with each addition. The slow addition and assessment of the side effects of consumption allows dieters to identify harmful food groups and eliminate or minimize their consumption in the future. As a result, you uncover a tailored diet plan that reduces or eliminates foods that affect healthy weight management, immune function, and moodiness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foods allowed during the 30-day elimination process:</th>
<th>Foods not allowed during the 30-day elimination process:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Meat (including seafood and eggs)</td>
<td>• Added sugar or sweeteners (real or artificial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vegetables</td>
<td>• Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fruit</td>
<td>• Grains (or pseudo-grains like quinoa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Natural fats</td>
<td>• Legumes (all beans, plus peas, chickpeas, lentils,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Herbs/spices/seasonings</td>
<td>peanuts, or soy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ghee/clarified butter, healthful oils</td>
<td>• Dairy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fruit juice</td>
<td>• Carrageenan, MSG, or sulfites</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Certain legumes (green beans, sugar snap peas,</td>
<td>• Junk foods that are “technically” compliant, such as</td>
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<td>and snow peas)</td>
<td>packaged chips or French fries</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Vinegar (except malt vinegar)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Coconut aminos (soy sauce substitute)</td>
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<td>• Salt</td>
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