

PATIENT PAYMENTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES
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Short-term effects of official patient fees on informal payments for health care in Hungary

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Abstract:

This study focuses on the relation between official patient fees and informal payments for health care services in Hungary. Official fees for the use of health care services were introduced in Hungary in 2007. One of their main objectives stipulated by the government was to convert the existing informal payments into formal charges.

The aim of this study is to analyse whether the introduction of official fees for out-patient and in-patient services in Hungary affected the level of informal patient payments for these services on a short run. A nation-wide datasets containing micro-level data on formal and informal payments for health care services is used for the analysis. The data were collected in a survey with health care consumers shortly after the implementation of official patient fees in Hungary.

In case of physician out-patient services, the results suggest no statistically significant change in the probability of paying informally after official patient charges were introduced. In case of in-patient care, the implementation of official charges affected the probability of paying informally only in case of elderly patients: they pay less often informally during the hospitalisation after the introduction of official charges. Overall, the results suggest that on short-run, official patient charges could not replace informal payments. These findings have implications for future patient payment reforms.

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