

THE INFLUENCE OF TIME COST ON THE UTILIZATION OF AMBULATORY CARE AMONG PATIENTS IN A MEDICAL CENTER

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The objects of the study are to determine the influence of time cost and monetary cost on the utilization of the outpatient service in a medical center, and to estimate the elasticities of both costs. Systemic sampling was used to obtain 10% sample patients in the outpatient department during the survey period. With the survey and the extraction of data from the hospital computer file, information about each patient's utilization amount in the latest six months, diagnosis, demographic characteristics, individual wage, family income, health condition, monetary cost and time cost needed for the latest visit is collected. Results of

multiple regression analysis, using utilization amount as the dependent variable, indicate that patients who are older, have worse self-evaluated health status, have appointments in advance, have preferences for the doctors or services of this hospital, and paid less time cost, tend to use more of the ambulatory care in this hospital ($p < 0.05$). Despite that time cost is a significant factor, its elasticity is quite low (0.05). On the other hand, both income and monetary costs do not significantly influence the utilization of outpatient services. (*Chin J Public Health. (Taipei): 1997; 16(4): 319-328*)

Key words: *time cost, price elasticity, medical center.*

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