

Navigating the Orthopaedic Maze as a New Patient: A National Mystery Caller Study on Medicaid Coverage and Access to Orthopaedic Surgeons

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INTRODUCTION

- Medicaid provides affordable healthcare to individuals under 65 whose annual income is below 133% of the federal poverty level.
- As of September 2023, 88.4 million people were enrolled in Medicaid.
- Patients with Medicaid are **significantly less likely** to have success when scheduling an appointment with a physician compared to patients with private insurance.
- Mystery Caller studies are an effective way to acquire objective data and insight into patients' challenges when accessing healthcare.

OBJECTIVES

PURPOSE: To evaluate access and new patient appointment wait times for subspecialty orthopaedic care based on insurance type and to identify factors influencing these wait times.

SIGNIFICANCE: Largest study to date comparing access to care and new patient appointment wait times for orthopaedic sub-specialty care for patients with Medicaid or Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BCBS) insurance.

METHODS

Step 1

- Physician data pulled from American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) patient-facing database
- Included Specialties: Adult reconstruction, Foot & Ankle, General, Hand, Pediatric, Spine, Sports Medicine
- 672 unique physicians identified

Step 2

- Calls were made to each of the 672 unique physician clinics to screen out incorrect phone numbers and physicians no longer practicing
- 501 physicians included following the initial screen

Step 3

- 1,002 phone calls made to 501 unique orthopaedic clinics by trained Mystery Callers
- Mystery Callers posed as patients with a "textbook" clinical scenario for the respective specialty being called
- Mystery Callers posed as patients with either Medicaid or Blue Cross/Blue Shield insurance and asked for the soonest available appointment with the physician of interest

RESULTS

Table 1. Univariate analysis of demographics of included physicians.

	Accept Medicaid and/or Blue Cross/Blue Shield (N = 219)	Do Not Accept Medicaid (N = 130)	Overall (N = 349)	p-value
Age, year	58 (IQR 52, 64)	61 (IQR 53, 65)	58 (IQR 52, 65)	0.03*
Sex				0.20
Male	204 (62%)	125 (38%)	329 (94%)	
Female	15 (7%)	5 (2%)	20 (6%)	
Orthopaedic Specialty				<0.01*
Adult Reconstructive	40 (69%)	18 (31%)	58 (17%)	
Foot & Ankle	30 (63%)	18 (37%)	48 (14%)	
General	48 (73%)	18 (27%)	66 (19%)	
Hand	27 (60%)	18 (40%)	45 (13%)	
Pediatric	21 (95%)	1 (5%)	22 (6.3%)	
Spine	24 (45%)	29 (55%)	53 (15%)	
Sports Medicine	29 (51%)	28 (49%)	57 (16%)	
Academic Affiliation				<0.01*
Academic	32 (84%)	6 (16%)	38 (11%)	
Not Academic	187 (60%)	124 (40%)	311 (89%)	
Rurality				<0.01*
Metropolitan area	183 (59%)	126 (41%)	309 (89%)	
Rural area	36 (90%)	4 (10%)	40 (11%)	

Table 2. Multivariate analysis results of factors impacting wait time for new patient appointment.

Predictors	Incidence Rate Ratios	CI	p - value
(Intercept)	9.53	5.96 – 15.23	<0.01*
Insurance [Medicaid]	1.1	1.05 – 1.15	<0.01*
Orthopaedic Specialty [Adult Reconstructive]			
Foot & Ankle	0.77	0.49 – 1.20	0.3
General	0.86	0.57 – 1.30	0.5
Hand	1.05	0.68 – 1.64	0.8
Pediatric	0.72	0.43 – 1.19	0.2
Spine	1.03	0.66 – 1.60	0.9
Sports Medicine	0.75	0.48 – 1.16	0.2
Number of Transfers [Zero Transfers]			
One	0.89	0.83 – 0.96	<0.01*
Two	1.02	0.89 – 1.16	0.8
More than two	1.05	0.83 – 1.32	0.7
US Census Bureau Subdivision [East North Central]			
Pacific (WA, OR, CA, AK)	1.75	1.12 – 2.73	0.01*
West North Central (ND, SD, MN, IA, NE, KS, MO)	1.7	1.05 – 2.76	0.03*
Academic Affiliation [Academic]	1.92	1.38 – 2.69	<0.01*
Call Time (minutes)	1.08	1.05 – 1.11	<0.01*

Key Findings

- Medicaid was associated with a 10% longer wait for new patient appointments
- 37% of physicians did not accept Medicaid
- Academic affiliation was associated with a 92% longer wait for new patient appointments
- Certain regions and prolonged call times were associated with longer waits for new patient appointments, respectively
- Only one transfer was associated with an 11% decreased wait for new patient appointment

CONCLUSION

When seeking a new patient appointment with an orthopaedic surgeon, patients with Medicaid experienced decreased access to care and prolonged wait times compared to patients with Blue Cross/Blue Shield insurance.