

Medicaid Insurance and Access to Hip, Knee, and Shoulder Arthroscopic Surgeons

Background: Medicaid coverage is associated with longer appointment wait times, poorer health outcomes, and decreased access to care compared to private insurance across multiple medical specialties. Currently, there is a paucity of data assessing the impact of Medicaid coverage on new patient access to care and appointment wait times for orthopaedic sports medicine surgeons.

Purpose: To assess the impact of insurance status on patient access to care and appointment wait times for sports medicine-trained orthopaedic hip, knee, and shoulder arthroscopists.

Study Design: Cross-Sectional Study

Methods: Sports medicine-trained orthopaedic surgeons were identified using the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons patient-facing database, and physicians were categorized by joint specialization (hip, knee, or shoulder). Mystery callers posing as either Medicaid or Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BCBS) insured patients with a textbook presentation of a non-urgent hip, knee, or shoulder injury contacted physicians to request the next available new patient appointment. Business days until the first available new patient appointment were recorded and analyzed using a linear mixed Poisson regression model.

Results: A total of 1,046 phone calls were made to 523 unique sports medicine orthopaedic clinics in 48 states. Of the 385 included physicians, 34% (129) did not accept Medicaid. Medicaid patients experienced a 20% longer wait for a new patient appointment compared to patients with BCBS (Incidence Rate Ratio (IRR): 1.20; 95% CI: 1.14 - 1.26; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, patients with Medicaid experienced an increased wait time at academic institutions and specific geographic locations ($p < 0.05$). No significant difference in access to care or wait time was identified between hip, knee, and shoulder arthroscopists ($p = 0.68$). Our model achieved an R-squared value of 0.93, demonstrating strong explanatory power.

Conclusion: Patients with Medicaid experience decreased access to care and longer wait times when scheduling an appointment with sports medicine-trained orthopaedic surgeons compared to patients with BCBS insurance. These findings highlight a critical disparity in care, underscoring the need for additional research to identify the cause and implement solutions.