

## **Surprise Billing in Total Joint Arthroplasty**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

Patients often receive multiple bills following surgery, which may come as a surprise if patients are not appropriately informed or educated prior to surgery. Despite recent efforts of Congress to protect patients from receiving surprise bills, many patients remain vulnerable. The purpose of this study was to identify if surprise billing occurs following total joint arthroplasty (TJA) and its effect on patient satisfaction.

### **METHODS:**

We included all patients who underwent a primary total hip arthroplasty (THA) or total knee arthroplasty (TKA) from May 2020 to March 2022 by four surgeons at a single large multicenter institution. Patients completed a questionnaire regarding the incidence of surprise bills following their surgery, the details regarding those bills, and how those bills affected their surgical satisfaction.

### **RESULTS:**

Of the 918 responses out of 3,422 (27%), 12% stated they received at least one surprise bill following their TJA, with the 46% receiving bills totaling >\$1,000. Patients who received a surprise bill had lower satisfaction scores ( $p=0.002$ ), and 49% reported that the billing process directly affected their satisfaction with surgery. Of the patients who had surgery after the implementation of the 'No Surprises Act' on January 1, 2022, 18% received a surprise bill, which was significantly more than those that underwent surgery beforehand (11%,  $p = 0.04$ ). There was no significant difference in the number or amount of bills received compared to those who had surgery before.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:**

Substantial patients undergoing elective TJA received a surprise bill following surgery, which negatively correlated with their surgical satisfaction. It does not appear that the 'No Surprises Act' diminished the likelihood of surprise billing. Although surprise bills may not be able to be eliminated postoperatively, increased communication and education regarding the perioperative billing process may prove to be beneficial for both patient satisfaction and the doctor-patient relationship.