More Patients Ignore Doctors' Orders and Leave Hospitals Early

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Would you leave the hospital early against medical advice? Well, the number of patients doing so is increasing in the United States, according to a report from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and reported by *The New York Times*.

For the report, researchers used 2008 hospital discharge data from the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP). The agency reported a 40 percent increase in the number of patients who left the hospital against doctors' orders over a 12-year period. During this time, 370,000 patients checked themselves out of the hospital early compared with 264,000 who did so in 1997.

"It could be that these patients are responsible for their own care, and they're concerned about the cost of care. It may be they have other personal obligations, and they don't have the support that they need on the outside, and they need to get back to family," said Anne Elixhauser, PhD, senior research scientist for AHRQ in Rockville, Maryland.

The overall numbers of people who opt for early discharge only represent a small fraction of hospital patients, but the uptick might indicate the amount of pressure and the types of social and economic issues people face when they become sick—issues that hospitals can't help with, Elixhauser explained.

Last year, AHRQ reported the average hospital stay for patients in 2008 was four days, with bills averaging about $7,000 each day.

Click here to find out why more black patients check themselves out of the hospital.

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