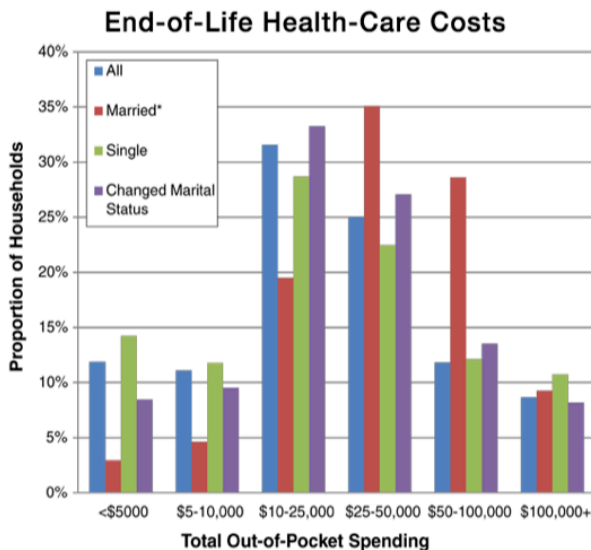


# The High Cost of Health Care and its Impact on the Elderly

## Problem

As one of the most vulnerable population groups, the elderly in the United States (age 65 or above) face incredible strain under health care costs. A recent study which appeared in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine* researched the amount of money Medicare-eligible seniors spent out of pocket in the last five years of their lives. The study found that on average the seniors spent \$38,688 out of pocket in the last five years of their lives. No matter their marital status the average spent was relatively similar, please see the graph below. The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation released a study which showed that 58% of people did not seek a medical treatment that they needed because the cost was too high. In the medical field there is a mindset that increasing co-payments for doctor visits will reduce unnecessary visits, however this causes individuals to avoid seeking care early on which can lead to an expensive illness or



Source: <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Articles/2012/09/10/Out-of-Pocket-Medical-Costs-Threaten-Seniors>

injury that could have been prevented. This issue is especially prevalent for seniors. Increased co-payments for outpatient care lead to 20% fewer outpatient doctor visits and an increase of 2.2% in hospital visits (which lasted on average 13.4 days) according to the findings detailed in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. Medicare is unable to keep up with the ever increasing costs of health care, this leaves one of our most vulnerable populations in serious risk for their health especially in the last few years of their life.

## Analysis

The rising cost of health care for seniors is an issue that needs to be addressed immediately. The high cost of outpatient visits to the doctor, which can be seen as preventative measures, causes the elderly to reduce their visits which can lead to future hospitalizations or more serious health impacts. While some of these outpatient visits do require prescriptions to be

written, a good percentage focus on preventative measures and discussion which can be accomplished with a nurse rather than with a doctor. Meeting with a nurse rather than a doctor incurs smaller health care costs and ultimately lower out-of-pocket costs for the elderly. Seniors need to be educated and have easier access to nurses. In the market today some medical groups have a phone number to call the nurse on duty or online reference guides for common health issues however there is not anything specifically for the elderly and easy access to nurses and other medical resources. The elderly need a way to quickly get in contact with their nurse to review what health issues they are having, find solutions and be informed if they need to meet with a doctor or specialist.