

Association of Ameritech/SBC Retireessm Blue Bulletin
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Proudly working on behalf of retirees of Ameritech, SBC and predecessor/successor Bell Companies of the New AT&T, located throughout the United States

Be Aware Of A New Health Care Cost Concern

One of our members has made AASBCRSM aware of another “layer” within the health care system. The retiree’s wife had two recent surgeries and they have started receiving the bills. They received a bill for \$4,700.00, from a doctor whose name they did not even recognize. They did some checking and found this doctor was the surgeon’s assistant. This is what the retiree related to AASBCRSM:

“We reviewed the preapproval letter from the surgeon to United Health Care. There was no mention of this ‘assistant surgeon’. However, there was a note on the Explanation of Benefits (EOB) from UHC about questioning a charge and where to send an appeal letter. We wrote the appeal letter and United Health Care refigured the ‘assistant surgeon’ bill from \$4,700.00 to \$450.00.”

An AT&T benefits employee said that healthcare is very complex, and that some states require surgeons to have assistants. That varies by state. She also said that billing mistakes can be made. UHC may not have originally recognized the assistant as such and billed that doctor as non-network. When the retiree challenged it, UHC realized that this assistant was involved with the same surgery and paid it as in-network. Her recommendation is to first look at the hospital bill. Get it itemized if it is not. If the hospital bill is incorrect, the resulting EOB from UHC will also be wrong. Junk in, junk out. She reminded AASBCRSM that we are in a consumer driven health care plan. Employees and retirees now have some skin in the game and as such, we need to watch our bills carefully.

We all need to be aware that doctors may hire “assistants.” We need to ask the doctor/surgeon if they will be employing any added doctors. We also should question the charge for that added doctor as well.