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US hospital workers outspend on medical care

CHICAGO: Hospital employees spend 10% more on healthcare, consume more medical services, and are generally sicker than the rest of the US workforce, according to a study released yesterday.

The cost difference was even greater when dependents were taken into account, with healthcare costs 13% higher, including medical care and prescription drugs.

The study, conducted by Thomson Reuters Healthcare, analysed the health risk and utilisation of 1.1 million hospital workers and compared them with 17.8 million health plan members across all industries around the country.

Researchers did not look at the causes for the disparity. Healthcare workers and their dependents were more likely to be diagnosed and hospitalised to treat asthma, diabetes, congestive heart failure, HIV, hypertension and mental illness.

It found that the average cost of healthcare for hospital employees and their dependents was US\$4,662 (RM14,126) per year — US\$538 higher than that of the general population.

Hospital employees and their dependents saw their doctors less often, but were 22% more likely to visit an emergency room and spent 18% more time hospitalised, the study found.

Kreg Sherbine, co-author of the study, speculated that easy access to expensive care may play a role. The stressful environment of a hospital and the irregular hours that many hospital employees work, which together make it difficult to maintain a healthy lifestyle, may be another contributing factor, he said. — *Reuters*