

# THE COST OF PERFORMING FEES: ESTIMATING ANNUALIZED COSTS OF MOBILE FEES PROVIDERS FOR LTACH AND SNFS

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## INTRODUCTION

- Flexible endoscopic evaluation of swallowing (FEES) is an integral diagnostic procedure used to assess and diagnose swallowing disorders. The endoscopy equipment and trained speech-language pathologist (SLP) required for FEES exams are often unavailable in long-term acute care hospitals (LTACHs) and skilled nursing facilities (SNFs).
- Facilities may rely on third-party mobile FEES providers or a separate facility when FEES cannot be performed in-house.
- This study estimated the annual cost of third-party mobile FEES providers across varying procedure volumes in LTACH and SNF settings.

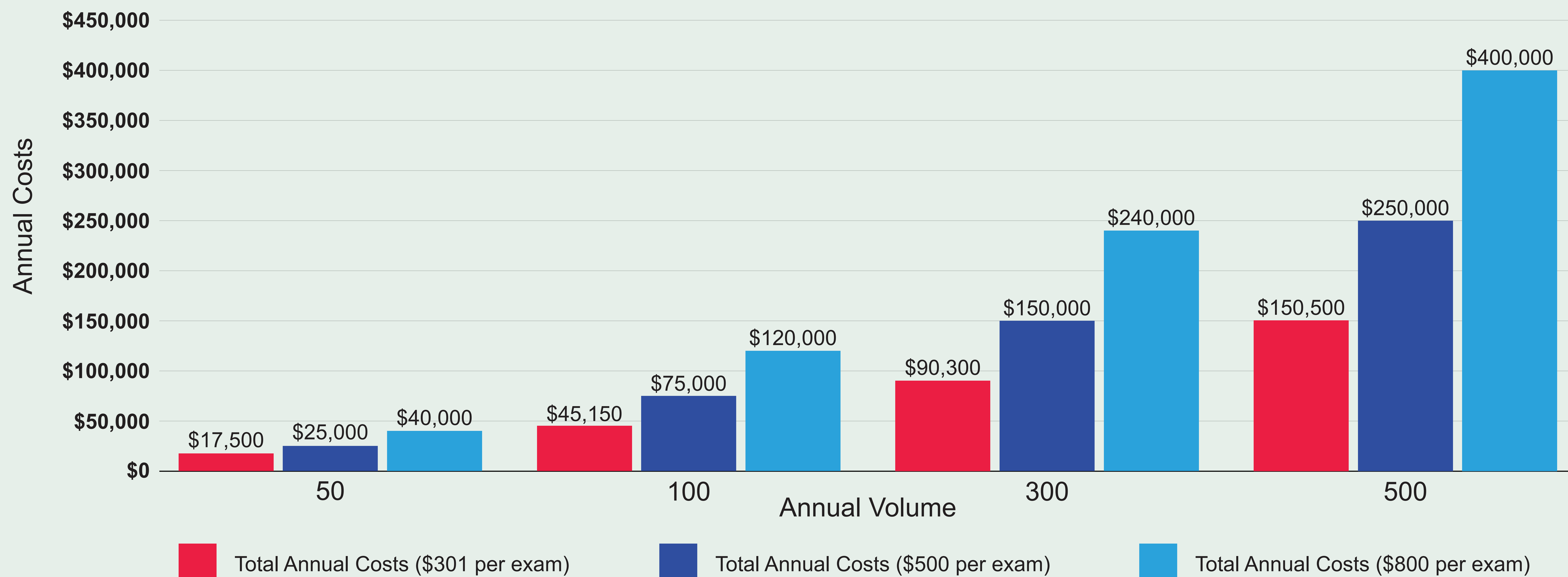
## METHODS

Third-party mobile providers' cost data and annual volumes were obtained from a national survey of 205 LTACH and SNF healthcare professionals with facility decision-making authority. A model was created to estimate the annual costs of third-party providers using average procedure volumes and costs from the survey. A sensitivity analysis evaluated cost differences with varying FEES volume and provider inputs.

## RESULTS

- Previously published survey results showed mobile provider costs ranging from \$301 to \$800 per exam (47% \$301-\$500, 35% \$501-\$800), with 78% of respondents performing more than 150 FEES annually.<sup>1</sup>
- The model estimated annual third-party FEES costs using per-exam costs of \$301, \$500 and \$800.
- Full results can be found below in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST OF MOBILE FEES IN THE LTACH/SNF SETTINGS



## DISCUSSION

- Patients who are admitted to LTACHs and SNFs are usually more complex medical presentations requiring longer stays, such as those requiring mechanical ventilation or recovering from severe neurological trauma.<sup>1</sup> Neurological trauma, such as a stroke or a severe brain injury, along with prolonged mechanical ventilation, are two common causes of oropharyngeal dysphagia.<sup>2</sup>
- Prior to discharge from these settings, these patients tend to have their oropharyngeal swallow evaluated to ensure there is no concern for aspiration and readmission following their hospitalization.
- For many LTACHs and SNFs, the required FEES-credentialed clinicians (SLPs) and endoscopy equipment are not available to their facility due to cost concerns or employee availability, meaning patients to be transported to other facilities or scheduling external mobile FEES providers to perform the evaluation in the facility. The costs incurred and the administrative burden of managing patient transport or external providers may impact the delivery of care, and ultimately the patient's length of stay.
- As seen in Figure 1, this financial burden could be significant and potentially unsustainable for some LTACHs and SNFs.

## CONCLUSION

For LTACHs and SNFs that do not have the appropriate equipment and trained staff readily available for FEES exams, utilizing third-party providers is a common alternative that can be costly across a variety of procedural volumes. Additionally, facility administrators noted incurring cancellation and rescheduling fees on top of the exam fees, which would increase the total annual costs incurred for these services.<sup>3</sup>

### REFERENCES

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