

Renewing health insurance should take more than 15 minutes, specialist says

October 24 2014, by Lindsey Elliott

Consumers spend more time picking out a television than picking out health insurance—and that could be a costly mistake, says a Kansas State University community health specialist.

"According to a recent [consumer report](#), people spend about 15 minutes choosing a [health insurance](#) plan, which is significantly less than the two hours spent on average choosing a television," said Roberta Riportella, Kansas Health Foundation professor of [community health](#) in the College of Human Ecology. "Health insurance is one of the most expensive items we purchase in a given year. Since policies often change from year to year, it's important to spend time considering your options."

Because plans change annually, Riportella cautions against choosing the same plan year after year during open enrollment without doing your homework first. She says to pay attention to a few key items: the network of providers, the cost-sharing amount and the deductible.

"Health insurance companies negotiate deals with hospitals, doctors and pharmacies each year, which means the network of providers can change from year to year," Riportella said. "Your doctor may take one type of insurance one year and no longer be in that network in the second year. That's been a longtime occurrence and has nothing to do with the health law changes. That is just the way the insurance industry works."

While you're checking the list of providers, also look at the cost-sharing amount, which can change from 20 percent to 25 percent any given year.

Most importantly, make sure you're choosing the type of plan that suits your needs.

"Employers are now offering a very different way of insuring yourself, and those are high-deductible plans where the employer is giving you an option to basically pay a lot of money up front, out-of-pocket, but then max that deductible out at a set amount, such as \$2,000," Riportella said. "Then you receive complete coverage. In most cases, people would actually do well in a high-deductible plan because they're not using a lot of [health care resources](#) in a given year."

Because these plans are less expensive to offer, employers may put up to \$1,000 in an individual's plan.

Riportella says the best way to choose a good fit for health insurance is to use a worksheet. Knowing your average annual [health](#) care costs will help you find the most cost-effective plan.

Provided by Kansas State University

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