

Dissertation Title: Three essays in Labor and Health Economics

Call the (Certified Nurse) Midwife: the Effect of Scope-of-Practice Laws on Hospital Costs and Patient Choice
(Job Market Paper)

Abstract: The high cost of to provide healthcare is a major driver of high medical spending in the United States. Reforming healthcare labor markets is an understudied and increasingly common way to lower these costs. To shed light on the effects of such reforms I use plausibly exogenous variation in the strictness of Scope-of-Practice laws for Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs). Half of all states have relaxed their SOP laws to allow CNMs to practice and prescribe independently of a physician. I estimate the effect of granting CNMs full independence on hospital facility costs using administrative data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and inpatient discharge records from the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP). Using a two-way fixed-effects model I find that allowing CNMs to practice independently substantially reduces hospital facility costs per birth and the use of intensive procedures, such as cesarean sections. These cost reductions are concentrated in hospitals that are well-positioned to integrate CNMs into their practice. Using a structural choice model, I decompose the overall effect of the policy into savings generated from increased hospital efficiency and savings due to changing selection of patients into hospitals. I find that the savings are primarily driven by increased hospital efficiency for low-risk patients and higher-risk patients select into higher-cost hospitals after the law change. These effects are attenuated by market concentration and a high density of OBGYNs.

The Effect of Electronic Benefit Transfer Cards on the Food Consumption of SNAP Recipients

Abstract: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food assistance to nearly 44 million Americans each year. I document a substantial increase in the program's ability to stimulate food consumption from 1990 to 2010, as measured by the marginal propensity to consume food (MPC_f) out of SNAP. I provide the first evidence for a mechanism driving this increase: the transition from paper coupons to Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. Using plausibly exogenous variation over states and time I estimate that the introduction of EBT doubles the MPC_f out of SNAP and accounts for 25 percent of its observed increase.

Adverse Life Events and Intergenerational Transfers (joint with Jessamyn Schaller)

Abstract: While there has been broad interest in the direct effects of major life events on older households that experience them, little attention has been paid to the intergenerational transmission of those effects—how negative shocks in parents' households affect the outcomes of their adult children—or to the role that grown children play in helping their parents to recover from adverse events. We use regression and event study approaches to examine within-family changes in monetary transfers and informal care following wealth loss, involuntary job displacement, spousal death, and health shocks in retirement-aged households. We find that giving to adult children is responsive to changes in parents' wealth and earned income. We document large reductions in the likelihood of making financial transfers to children following wealth loss and job displacement, particularly in households with low accumulated wealth. We also find that parents increase their transfers following spousal death and reduce them with the onset of disability or poor health. We find that upstream transfers are also responsive to life events—children, particularly those with low-wealth parents, increase their financial transfers and in-kind assistance following adverse shocks in their parents' household