

Some hospitals hazardous to health

By Lois M. Collins
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Patients in top-rated hospitals average a 71 percent lower risk of dying than those in the lowest-rated hospitals across 18 different diagnoses and procedures, according to the annual HealthGrades Hospital Quality in America study, issued last week by HealthGrades.

The report says 266,604 lives potentially could have been saved over the three years studied if all hospitals performed at the level of the best hospitals.

The report on patient outcomes looks at about 5,000 hospitals, excluding veterans' and military hospitals, based on 41 million Medicare hospitalization records from 2004-06.

"This is the only resource that consumers have to compare local hospitals in terms of patient outcomes," HealthGrades spokesman Scott Shapiro told the Deseret Morning News. "As the study documents, there are vast differences in quality from one hospital to the next. It's really important to do your homework."

HealthGrades, a health-quality rating company, says Utah hospitals saw an overall 17.23 percent improvement in mortality benchmarks, compared to 11.73 percent nationally. That included a 43.4 percent improvement from 2004-06 for deaths related to heart surgery, but a 16.3 percent decline for coronary interventional procedures. Only hospitals that perform a certain volume in a category are rated on it or counted in the averages. Utah saw nearly 25 percent improvement in mortality for heart failure and atrial fibrillation.

The greatest improvements nationally in mortality rates were for pancreatitis, pulmonary embolism and diabetic acidosis and coma. The smallest improvement was seen in mortality with resection/replacement of the abdominal aorta, coronary interventional procedures such as angioplasties and stents and heart attack treatment.

The study looked at outcomes and complications for atrial fibrillation, bowel obstruction, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), coronary bypass surgery, coronary interventional procedures (angioplasty/stent), diabetic acidosis and coma, gastrointestinal (GI) bleed, GI surgeries and procedures, heart attack, heart failure, pancreatitis, pneumonia, pulmonary embolism, resection/replacement of the abdominal aorta, respiratory failure, sepsis, stroke and valve replacement surgery. Star ratings are based on how well HealthGrades says the hospital does in an area.

Utah hospitals receiving five stars as high performers in mortality in at least one category include Alta View Hospital (COPD, pulmonary embolism, sepsis, respiratory failure and GI surgeries and procedures), American Fork Hospital (sepsis), Castleview Hospital (sepsis), Cottonwood (pneumonia, sepsis, respiratory failure, bowel obstruction

and general surgery), Davis Hospital and Medical Center (GI surgery and procedures), Dixie Regional Medical Center (heart attack, COPD, sepsis, respiratory failure, bowel obstruction and surgery for it, obstetrics), Gunnison Valley Hospital (pneumonia), Lakeview Hospital (pulmonary embolism), LDS Hospital (valve replacement surgery, pneumonia, stroke, diabetic acidosis and coma, sepsis), Logan Regional (acute heart attack, pneumonia, bowel obstruction and general surgery for bowel obstruction), McKay-Dee (pneumonia, bowel obstruction and general surgery for bowel obstruction), Mountain View (sepsis), Mountain West Medical Center (pneumonia, sepsis, GI bleed), Ogden Regional Medical Center (heart failure, pneumonia, GI surgeries and procedures), Pioneer Valley (GI bleed), Salt Lake Regional Medical Center (acute heart attack, pneumonia, GI surgeries and procedures), St. Mark's Hospital (heart failure, atrial fibrillation, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, pneumonia, stroke, pulmonary embolism, respiratory failure, GI bleed), Timpanogos Regional Hospital (sepsis), University Hospital (pneumonia), Utah Valley Regional Medical Center (heart failure, sepsis, bowel obstruction and general surgery for bowel obstruction) and Valley View Medical Center (GI bleed).

For major complications, Utah hospitals receiving the coveted five stars include Cache Valley Specialty Hospital (back and neck surgery), Cottonwood (total hip replacement, first surgery, obstetrics), Davis Hospital and Medical Center (appendectomy, total hip replacement first surgery and hip fracture repair), Dixie Regional Medical Center (appendectomy), Lakeview Hospital (total hip replacement, first surgery), LDS Hospital (bowel obstruction, GI bleed, general surgery/bowel obstruction, total hip replacement first surgery), McKay-Dee Hospital (women's health, obstetrics), Ogden Regional Medical Center (appendectomy, hip fracture repair, women's health, obstetrics), St. Mark's Hospital (appendectomy, total knee replacement first surgery, total hip replacement first surgery), The Orthopedic Specialty Hospital (total hip replacement first surgery), Timpanogos Regional Hospital (appendectomy) and Valley View Medical Center (total knee replacement first surgery, hip fracture repair).

The full study, along with its methodology and state-by-state hospital-quality statistics, can be found at www.healthgrades.com.

HealthGrades doesn't charge consumers for the information, but it does sell more in-depth hospital reports. It also licenses the ability to reprint its findings, perhaps as an advertising tool, Shapiro said.

And physician-led teams take the company's huge database and consult with hospitals on how to lower death and complication rates. Some employers and health insurance plans buy a customized version of the Web site to offer as a free benefit to employees to help them find better care, as well.