

Ratings Sites Enable Online Surgeon Comparison



Two new web sites provide "ratings" of surgeons based on analysis of data on surgical complications rates and patient outcomes. These ratings are intended to help patients and their families in finding the right surgeon for an operation.

SurgeonRatings.org, run by the nonprofit Consumers' Checkbook/Center for the Study of Services, only lists surgeons that have had better-than-average outcomes based on an analysis of more than four million surgeries performed by 50,000 surgeons on hospital inpatients. Ratings are based on federal government records previously not available to the public, the organisation said.

The online ratings take into account how often the surgeon's patients die in the hospital or within 90 days of discharge, have serious complications in the hospital or are readmitted to the hospital within 90 days of discharge.

Checkbook's site allows consumers to search by ZIP code for the best-performing surgeons in 14 types of major surgery, including heart valve and bypass surgery, gastric surgery and knee or hip replacement.

"This is the first time we're doing this and it's going to catch people by surprise," explained Robert Krughoff, Checkbook's president. "So we chose this time to focus on the good ones and to tell people who they are."

The other website, Surgeon Scorecard, does include surgeons that have higher-than-average complications based on infections, clots or infections that call for post-operative care. Scores (ratings) are based on death and complication rates for surgeons performing one of eight elective procedures in Medicare, including gall bladder removal, knee replacement, and prostate removal, according to the nonprofit news outlet ProPublica, which owns the site. Rate computation takes into account differences in patient health, age and hospital quality.

Stephen Engelberg, ProPublica's editor-in-chief, said that the publication decided a year ago to publicly compare the performance of surgeons because consumers did not have access to the information.

"These days, consumers can review ratings on everything from plumbers to hair salons to the latest digital cameras," he said. "The process of undergoing surgery includes some of the most consequential decisions any of us ever make...We believe [Surgeon Scorecard] is an important tool for improving patient safety, one that incorporates the rights of patients as well as of doctors."

Source: ProPublica; SurgeonRatings.org

Image credit: Pixabay

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