

U.S. News best hospital rankings shouldn't be the gold standard

Comparison sees flaws in analysis and rankings

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U.S. News & World Report's best hospital list may mislead consumers about the hospitals' quality of care, according to a Comparison Medical Analytics study that points out what it thinks are flaws in the criteria.

Comparison argues that there are flaws in the rankings' criteria, mainly based on reputation, survival rates and patient safety indicators across major academic medical centers.

Dr. Thane Forthman, president and CEO of Comparison, takes issue with three "shortcomings" in the study: "The small number of quality indicators used to assess 75 percent of the specialties, the use of subjective, reputation-based data to rank the other 25 percent of specialties, and the assumption that comparing academic medical centers to less than 10 percent of U.S. hospitals nationally provides reliable information regarding their quality of care."

Comparison based its research on its own patent pending composite quality scoring methodology--its evaluation looks at core process of care measures, outcome measures and patient satisfaction scores. Forthman says its study indicates that when objective quality measures are used, the U.S. News rankings have no correlation to his company's quality rankings.

U.S. News' 1-5 rankings included Massachusetts General Hospital, Johns Hopkins, Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic and UCLA. Differing greatly, Comparison's rankings had Indiana University, Mayo Clinic, Duke University, University of Michigan and Northwestern rounding out their top five.

Forthman noted in the announcement, "In order to provide reliable comparisons among hospitals, the study removed unusually difficult cases (i.e., outliers) and adjusted for differences in patient risk factors (i.e., clinical and demographic characteristics). Otherwise, differences in quality performance could be attributed to differences in the complexity of cases treated. Additionally, all performance indicators were tested for statistical significance so a hospital's relative rank and percentile score could be accurately determined."

Comparison concludes that people shouldn't necessarily assume the academic medical centers ranked by U.S. News and World Report provide the best care. The group cites both *Fierce Healthcare* and *Becker's Hospital Review* research from November 2010 in arguing that hospitals not affiliated with universities perform equal or better care.