

Quality of care low at notable university hospitals

By Dan Bowman
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Despite the common assumption that university-affiliated hospitals offer better care than their non-university counterparts, a new study published this week by medical rankings service CareChex found that just the opposite is true.

In terms of overall quality of care, for instance, many notable facilities--including George Washington University Hospital, Stanford Hospital, Johns Hopkins Hospital and the University of Chicago Medical Center--performed in the bottom 25 percent of all hospitals nationwide. Nearly 90 percent of all university hospitals performed below the national average for orthopedic care, while 85 percent were below the national average for general surgery, according to the study, which was published on behalf of healthcare information service company, Comparion Medical Analytics.

"We were especially surprised to see the study reveal that some of the nation's best-known university hospitals scored in the bottom quartile of all hospitals nationally for overall quality of hospital care," Dr. Thane Forthman, president and CEO of Comparion, said in a statement. "Regardless of the potential factors contributing to the issue, patients should consider the quality of care provided by all hospitals in their market before making the assumption that a university hospital will provide superior care."

Some of those factors, according to Forthman, include residents' lack of experience, as well as extended work shifts of up to 80 hours per week.

Despite the findings, university hospitals were more likely to provide better cancer care and better medical care overall. Forty-three percent of the university hospitals studied ranked in the top 10 percent for cancer care, with 17 percent in the top 10 percent for overall care.

CareChex looked at 118 university hospitals overall, evaluating them based on Comparion's National Quality Ranking Database. That database includes nearly all general, acute, non-federal U.S. hospitals, and pulls information from the Hospital Quality Alliance's Hospital Compare All Payer database and CMS's Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems database.