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NEW JERSEY HAILS LATEST REPORT CARD ON BYPASS SURGERIES

Staff writer and wire reports - The mortality rate after heart bypass surgery in NJ ticked up by a fraction in 2003 but still is held the rate of a decade ago, despite the increasing age and frailty of the patients, according to the state health department.

It's eight report on bypass mortality rates, released yesterday, showed 159 patients died out of the 6,817 patients who received heart bypass surgery in 2003, the most recent year for which data has been analyzed. Among the 17 New Jersey hospitals that were performing heart bypass surgery that year, the average mortality rate within 30 days of surgery was 2.33 percent. That was up from 2.15 percent in 2002, but the difference was small enough to have occurred by chance.

"Cardiac surgery in New Jersey continues to be excellent overall," Dr. Fred M. Jacobs, health and senior services commissioner, said in announcing findings of the report, which is meant to help patients, families and insurers choose among surgery programs.

"Research tells us that these publicly released performance reports work," said Jacobs.

St. Francis Medical Center in Trenton had the third lowest mortality rate in the state at 0.84, a mark that was greeted gleefully by hospital officials.

"This is outstanding news," said Dr. Glenn Laub, the chief of cardiac surgery at St. Francis. "It shows that we can offer excellent cardiac care with outstanding results to our local community."

At the Deborah Heart and Lung Center in Pemberton Township, the mortality rate was 3.71, above the state average of 2.33, but the report said the hospital's rate was not "statistically different from the statewide average."

"While we are encouraged that our scores fall within the state average for cardiac surgery outcomes, Deborah holds itself to its own high standards for surgical excellence, professionalism and patient care in the field of cardiac surgery," said Dr. Lynn McGrath, the hospital's vice president of medical affairs.

Statewide, the mortality rate from bypass surgery has declined by 50 percent over a decade, from 4.5 percent in 1994 to 2.27 percent in 2003, after adjusting for differences in patients' risk according to the severity of their heart disease and other health problems they may have.

"As you continue to make improvements in cardiac surgery," Jacobs said, "you reach a point where significant reduction in mortality is no longer possible. Whether this is the point or not, I don't know yet."

He noted there was a small increase in the rate in 1999, but it resumed falling after that.

Patients getting the surgery -- in which a blood vessel is taken from another part of the body and sewn into the heart muscle to bypass a blocked artery -- today tend to be older, have more widespread damage to the heart muscle and have other serious diseases.

That's because improvements over the past five years in the technology for artery-clearing angioplasty have made that procedure more popular for younger, healthier patients. In angioplasty, a catheter is threaded from the groin up into a clogged artery, where a balloon is inflated to flatten out plaque deposits. Usually a metal scaffold is then inserted to keep the artery from re-clogging.

In New Jersey, the number of bypass operations fell 19 percent over five years, from 8,377 in 1998 to the 6,817 in 2003, following a national trend.

Hospital Mortality Rates – NJ

(from 2003 data)

A new state report “Cardiac Surgery in New Jersey 2003” shows that on average 2.33 percent of heart bypass patient died within 30 days of undergoing surgery that year. Mortality rates at the 17 hospitals then licensed to do cardiac surgery:

Hospital	% mortality
Atlanticare Regional Medical Center, Atlantic City	0.75
Cooper University Hospital, Camden	5.69
Deborah Heart and Lung Center, Browns Mills	3.71
Englewood Hospital and Medical Center	0
Hackensack University Medical Center	1
Jersey Shore University Medical Center, Neptune	1.73
Morristown Memorial Hospital	2.24
Newark Beth Israel Medical Center	2.28
Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, Camden	3.32
Passaic Beth Israel Regional Medical Center	4.33
Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, New Brunswick	2.99
Saint Barnabas Medical Center, Livingston	1.64
St. Francis Medical Center, Trenton	.84
St. Joseph’s Regional Medical Center, Paterson	2.39
St. Michael’s Medical Center, Newark	1.63
University Hospital-UMDNJ, Newark	2.23
Valley Hospital, Ridgewood	2.32

Source: New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services