5 states require disclosure of heart bypass quality data.

Dr. Grover's group, the University of Colorado Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, received a two-star, or "average," rating. The Society of Thoracic Surgeons developed the composite star-rating system two years ago.

"A composite is the Holy Grail for anyone interested in ratings," said John Santa, MD, MPH, director of the Consumer Reports Health Ratings Center. "Oftentimes, folks selling services or products drown you in so much information that you can't tell what's important and what's not."

Since 1989, the society has poured millions of dollars into creating and maintaining the adult cardiac database upon which the ratings are based. The critical factor in persuading physicians to share their performance publicly was the scientific rigor of the metrics, said David M. Shahian, MD, chair of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons' Workforce on National Databases.

"There is not a set of risk adjustment models or quality measurement methodologies in all of medicine that has been as extensively vetted and made as publicly available as these measures," he said.

About 90% of the approximately 1,100 cardiac surgical groups in the U.S. participate in the society's database, though just 22% of these groups chose to make their performance public on the Consumer Reports website. The number of groups publicly reporting should grow with time, said Dr. Shahian, professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School in Boston.

"This is a fairly revolutionary step, and having 22% as early adopters for something as controversial as this is pretty good," he said. "We have not had one group say this is philosophically the wrong thing to do. Many people wanted to step back and let others put their toes in the water first and see how it went before they consented. What people are going to see is that it's gone very smoothly and many more programs will
participate. There will be pressure from consumers and payers on programs that didn't participate to join in."

**A matter of time**

Consumer advocates applauded the news.  

"It's exciting, and I think it's long overdue," said Arthur A. Levin, MPH, director of the nonprofit Center for Medical Consumers in New York City. "All of us wish it would have happened sooner, but it's happening, and it's certainly a beginning."

The *Consumer Reports* heart bypass ratings represent a "watershed event in health care accountability," according to a Sept. 7 editorial in *The New England Journal of Medicine* co-authored by Timothy G. Ferris, MD, MPH, medical director of the Massachusetts General Physicians Organization.

"It's taken a long time to get here, and there are good reasons for that," Dr. Ferris said. "This is not easy stuff. Outcomes measurement and rating is very complicated from a data-and-statistics point of view.

"The Society of Thoracic Surgeons has invested a huge amount in both money and time and leadership resources to bring this to fruition, so kudos to them for the work necessary to make this happen," Dr Ferris added.

The Massachusetts General Hospital Division of Cardiac Surgery received a three-star, or "above average," rating.

Few other specialty societies are well-positioned to release clinical quality performance data soon, experts said.

The American College of Cardiology hopes to follow the thoracic surgeons' lead on quality disclosure by late 2011 or early 2012, said Janet Wright, MD, the college's senior vice president for science and quality. The college operates five data registries involving about 2,300 hospitals and 600 physician practices.

The American Medical Association-convened Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement has endorsed 221 measures for doctors to gauge their quality in clinical areas ranging from acute otitis externa to substance use disorders.

The print version of this content appeared in the Sept. 27 issue of *American Medical News*.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

**Grading bypass quality**

About a fifth of the country's cardiac surgical groups volunteered to have their performance ratings on coronary-artery bypass grafting procedures publicly disclosed at the *Consumer Reports* website. The 221 groups from 42 states are rated on a one- to three-star scale developed by the Society of Thoracic Surgeons.

Here is how the quality ratings break down:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups achieving rating</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 stars (above average)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 stars (average)</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 star (below average)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Heart bypass surgery ratings, *Consumer Reports* Health, Sept. 7

**WEBLINK**


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