



Surgeries Planned In Advance Save Lives and Money



Surgical care plays a major role in the rising cost of hospital care in the United States, representing nearly 30 percent of total healthcare expenditures. New research shows that hospital expenditures and the mortality risks associated with three common procedures can be significantly reduced when the surgeries are planned in advance instead of being performed as emergency operations. The findings have been published online in *Annals of Surgery*.

Researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) in Boston and Howard University in Washington, D.C. compared the costs and risk of death for emergency surgery versus elective surgery for three procedures: abdominal aortic aneurysm repair, colon resection and coronary artery bypass graft. Data came from a nationally representative sample of more than 600,000 patients who underwent one of the three procedures between 2001 and 2010. Hospital costs of patient care were determined based on charges reported to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid by the hospitals.

The Benefits of Elective Surgery vs. Emergency Surgery

From a financial perspective, the study revealed a clear advantage of elective surgery over emergency surgery. Emergency surgery expenditures were 30 percent higher for abdominal aortic aneurysm repair, 53 percent higher for colon resection, and 17 percent higher for coronary artery bypass graft, compared to the costs of elective surgery.

Adil Haider, MD, MPH is the Director of the Center for Surgery and Public Health at BWH and the study's lead author. Dr. Haider said, "If 10 percent of these emergency surgeries had been performed electively, the cost difference would have been nearly \$1 billion over 10 years."

The benefits of scheduling surgical procedures in advance extend well beyond finances. Patients also fare better when their surgical procedures are elective. "Importantly, elective procedures are better for patients, too, who experience lower rates of mortality and better outcomes. There is a tremendous opportunity to save both lives and decrease costs," said Dr. Haider.

Fewer Emergency Surgeries Will Lower Overall Healthcare Costs

Dr. Haider and his colleagues conducted the analysis while at the Center for Surgical Trials and Outcomes Research at Johns Hopkins. The study is an example of the ongoing attempts by physician researchers to identify innovative methods for reducing surgical costs, which account for such a large percentage of overall healthcare spending in the US. By 2025, spending on surgical care is projected to top \$900 billion.

Source: Science Daily
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Published on : Tue, 30 Dec 2014