Country Folk Replacing More Joints Than City Slickers

Southern Illinois researchers have determined that Medicare beneficiaries living in rural areas are 27 percent more likely than urban dwellers to have total knee or hip replacement surgeries. Researchers also found women more likely than men to undergo total joint replacement surgeries. Full findings appear in the December issue of *Arthritis & Rheumatism*.

The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) reported that 773,000 Americans have a hip or knee replaced each year. Generally, new joints last 10 to 15 years and younger patients may need to have repeated surgeries to replace damaged joints.

The research team, led by Mark L. Francis, M.D., used the 2005 Medicare Provider Analysis and Review File from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, along with the entire 2005 Medicare denominator file to establish the study group. This cohort was comprised of close to six million rural Medicare beneficiaries and nearly 38 million urban recipients.

“We were surprised by the finding that more rural participants elected to undergo joint surgery than those in urban areas,” said Dr. Francis. “There was reason to believe that differences in physician access, cultural backgrounds, and the need to travel farther for surgery would deter more rural patients from elective surgical procedures.”

“While our study explored differences between rural and urban areas, joint replacement surgeries in suburban populations is an important area for future research,” concluded Dr. Francis. The authors also emphasized that results from this study are based on an industrialized country with an advanced transportation infrastructure and should not be generalized to less industrialized countries.

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