Mortality Rate Drops Among Pa. Coronary Bypass, Heart Valve Surgery Patients

Michael Iorfino

Over the past seven years, mortality rates for patients who had coronary artery bypass and/or heart valve surgery have fallen by more than 20 percent in Pennsylvania.

Despite an increase in complicated cases, the number of coronary artery bypass graft surgery patients who died in hospitals dropped 21 percent, from 1.9 percent in 2005 to 1.5 percent in 2012, according to data collected by the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council.

Meanwhile, in-hospital mortality rates for patients who underwent valve surgery fell by as much as 38 percent during the same time period, and a lower percentage of patients needed to be readmitted within 30 days for a heart-related infection or complication, according to the council's findings.

The report details outcomes for 20,164 patients who underwent coronary artery bypass graft and or heart valve surgery between July 1, 2011 and Dec. 31, 2012 at the 59 Pennsylvania general acute care hospitals performing the procedures.

"Even though the risk profile of the patients we are asked to treat has gotten worse - you know, older, sicker patients - our techniques have gotten better," said Russell Stahl, M.D., chief of cardiothoracic surgery and co-director of the cardiovascular service line at Geisinger Community Medical Center.

"And the surgeons in Pennsylvania, by in large, are very good surgeons."

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