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Compare hospital types

In a recent column, Dr. David Lipschitz takes subspecialty hospitals to task, urging patients and physicians to use general hospitals instead. So should you go to a subspecialty hospital? There is plenty of data to help make this decision. Check out hospital consumer assist reports on the Web.

Arkansas Heart Hospital, or AHH, is 10 years old and enormously successful. Primary reasons are high patient satisfaction, shorter stays, dedicated staff, lower cost and better outcomes. This year AHH received the only five star ranking in Arkansas and was in the top five percent for cardiac care nationwide.

Medicare publishes severity-of-illness data, and heart patients were sicker at AHH than Baptist or St. Vincent's, yet mortality rates were lower. Last year, 8.3 percent of admissions to AHH were charity, uninsured or Medicaid, similar to general hospitals. How about charges? A heart attack at AHH cost \$17,433 compared to \$27,608 at Baptist and \$25,618 at St. Vincent's. Stays at AHH were also shorter.

Lipschitz suggests that subspecialty hospitals constitute unfair competition. Did the Chicago Bears complain that playing the Colts in the Super Bowl was unfair? Competition in health care has been shown to result in both better quality and lower cost. Why wouldn't you want to go to a hospital where patients are happy, staff is superb, costs are lower and outcomes are better? Lipschitz's contention that avoiding subspecialty hospitals will ensure better health for you and your family just doesn't wash.

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