May 5, 2016

What's in a Hospital Star Rating

Medicare assigns hospitals one to five stars based on patient experience scores. But there are problems. First, it’s “unclear whether anyone actually uses” them. Second, the stars oversimplify the complexity of hospital care. It’s not exactly as simple as good food, good service restaurant ratings. Third, since patients won’t understand this, they’ll be clueless when comparing hospitals.

Interestingly, if patients focused only on stars, researchers found zero relationship between number of stars and mortality rates. I’d add that the stars are meaningless. One patient’s good is another patient’s bad. It’s all subjective. If you stop completing these surveys, you’ll help stop this costly federal farce.

“JAMA Forum: The Stars of Hospital Care: Useful Information or a Distraction?” Ashish K. Jha, MD, MPH, news@JAMA, April 20, 2016.