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An aerial photograph shows the Mississippi River side of St. Cloud Hospital. (Photo: Times photo)

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You can trust St. Cloud Hospital with your heart.

At least that's what data released by Consumer Reports on Thursday show. St. Cloud Hospital is one of only 17 hospitals nationwide to earn top scores in quality data for two common heart surgeries: heart bypass and aortic valve replacement.

St. Cloud Hospital received "better than expected" ratings, the highest given, for overall heart bypass surgery performance and overall aortic valve replacement surgery.

It is also the only hospital in Minnesota to earn that distinction, said Doris Peter, director of the Health Rating Center for Consumer Health Choices, a part of Consumer Reports. Nearly 500 hospital nationwide submitted data on heart surgery performance. That's about 60 percent of all hospitals nationwide.

Doris Peter is the director of the Health Rating Center for Consumer Health Choices, a part of Consumer Reports.

(Photo: Courtesy of Consumer Reports)

Despite the less than 100 percent reporting rate, the scores are significant, explained Peter.

"A small percentage of hospitals get the highest ratings," Peter said. "The fact that St. Cloud has it is really great. Most hospitals are in the middle in this method. ... Outliers on either end are rare. (St. Cloud Hospital is) a solid, good performer."

When Consumer Reports first published this database, about 30 percent of hospitals had sent in data. While the Mayo Clinic missed the deadline on this report, it plans to participate in the next round, Peter said.

In Minnesota, 12 hospitals had relevant data they submitted, including North Memorial Medical Center, Hennepin County Medical Center, Regions Hospital, Park Nicollet Methodist Hospital and University of Minnesota Medical Center. All others received average, or "as expected," ratings in most categories.

In Minnesota, 12 hospitals submitted data including North Memorial Medical Center, Hennepin County Medical Center, Regions Hospital, Park Nicollet Methodist Hospital and University of Minnesota Medical Center. Other than St. Cloud, all Minnesota hospitals received "as expected" ratings in most categories.

Of the 145 hospitals in Minnesota, 16 report having an adult cardiac surgery service, Peter said.

St. Cloud Hospital performed 311 bypass operations within the data's time frame, July 2015 through June 2016. Surgeons performed 152 valve operations within the time frame, from July 2013 through June 2016.

Consumer Reports produced the Healthy Heart Report in partnership with the Society of Thoracic Surgeons. The society collects data directly from hospitals on several key measures.

Here's how St. Cloud Hospital did and what the measurements mean:

#### **Both bypass surgery and aortic valve replacement:**

- Patient survival: Percent of patients who leave the hospital and survive at least 30 days after surgery.
  - **Bypass rating: As expected.**
  - **Valve rating: As expected.**
- Complications: Percent of patients who avoid the most serious complications, such as a second operation, a deep chest infection, stroke, kidney failure and prolonged ventilation.
  - **Bypass rating: As expected.**
  - **Valve rating: Better than expectations.**

#### **Bypass:**

- Best surgical technique: Percent of patients who receive at least one graft from a certain artery under the breastbone, which improves survival.
  - **Rating: As expected.**
- Use of right drugs: Percent of patients who receive beta-blockers before and after surgery to control blood pressure and heart rhythm, aspirin or similar drugs to prevent blood clots and a drug to lower cholesterol.
  - **Rating: Better than expected.**

Along with the data, Consumer Reports gives a wide range of information on heart care, from who really needs to take heart-related drugs for blood pressure and cholesterol to when certain tests may be unnecessary.

Put simply, more is not always better.

The magazine even includes quality ratings for home blood-pressure monitors, on which results can vary wildly. Consumers also get a guide to requesting data from hospitals that don't publicly share data, and good questions to



ask of the person doing your next surgery.

In the past, quality data for health care outcomes was hard to come by. Hospitals and individual doctors were reluctant to share their data. But that is starting to change.

"It's becoming more normalized to become more transparent," Peter said. This isn't happening with individual doctors yet, but she thinks they will as the data becomes more reliable and trusted by doctors.



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St. Cloud Hospital. (Photo: Times file photo)

More hospitals are participating, even the ones that are lower performing. So the distribution has very few outliers on the top or the bottom.

The idea is that the more transparent hospitals are, the more pressure there is to improve quality scores, which is better for everyone, at the top and bottom.

Insurers also look at quality data, using their own concoctions to determine which hospitals will be in their network.

Ultimately, Consumer Reports hopes patients can be more empowered consumers when it comes to their health care.

"There this huge imbalance," Peter said, in power between doctors and patients. Patients are slow to question decisions or even to ask how expensive something is. It's uncomfortable, she said.

Peter hopes to make conversations about quality, possible side effects, necessity, risk reduction, alternatives and cost a more normal one, for both consumers and doctors.

**More online**

To find out more about St. Cloud Hospital's rating, as well as nearly 500 hospitals around the nation, visit [www.consumerreports.org/health/hospitals/ratings](http://www.consumerreports.org/health/hospitals/ratings).

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