

Position paper: Consultant outcome data

This document provides an overview of consultant outcome data, and The Brain Tumour Charity's views on its use.

What are consultant outcome data?

Consultant outcome data are clinical results for individual surgeons, published by the Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (HQIP) and available through the NHS Choices website (1). In October 2014, Neurosurgery was added to the published data.

The data available varies from specialism to specialism but in the case of the neurosurgery data; the public can access the following:

- A title screen which will tell you how long the surgeon has been qualified for, how many procedures he or she has undertaken and whether he or she falls within the normal expected range.

The source data are also available, and show the following:

- The number of elective procedures (surgery that is scheduled in advance because it does not involve a medical emergency) undertaken by that surgeon.
- The type of elective procedure. In the case of neurosurgery this appears on the NHS Choices website as only 'Cranial' or 'Spinal', however brain surgery data encompasses biopsy, resection and various other procedures. A full list can be found on The Society of British Neurological Surgeons (SBNS) website (2).
- The 30 Day Risk Adjusted Elective Procedural Mortality. This shows the mortality rate for each consultant neurosurgeon, adjusted to take into account various factors including the complexity of the surgery, other comorbidities (the presence of one or more additional disorders or diseases co-occurring with a primary disease or disorder), age and sex of patients.

In some instances data will not be available for the performance of a consultant. This may be because:

- Data on the procedures that the consultant carries out for that specialty may not be collected.
- The consultant may not have carried out enough procedures to be included in the analysis, which would make the data unreliable. A doctor might have carried out low numbers of procedures as a responsible consultant if they only became a consultant towards the end of the analysis period, or if they stopped practising the procedures listed part way through the analysis period.
- The consultant may have retired or stopped carrying out the procedures on which data are published.
- The consultant may practise outside England. Data applies only to England, although some data for Scotland and Wales has been made available in some specialties.

The Brain Tumour Charity's View

We welcome a move towards greater transparency and greater patient choice. However, the data are difficult to navigate to without searching for 'consultant data'. Searching for the name of the consultant does not bring this information up.

The data and the explanations provided by the NHS choices website can be complicated and difficult to read. The data may also be misleading because, whilst there is a risk-adjustment, neurosurgery is highly complex with higher risks attributed to more complex and innovative surgeries. Neurosurgery has a large range of risk. Procedures range from relatively straight forward, very low risk operations which can last less than an hour, to much more complex ones lasting more than twelve hours, where the risk of death may be as high as 1 in 10. Thus the risk of death from a planned neurosurgical operation may differ by more than a 100-fold (3). Additionally there is some evidence that results are affected by case load. The greater the number of times that a surgeon performs a procedure, the lower the outcome risks attributed to it (4,5). When the data was first published there were some concerns expressed amongst surgeons that the data might result in surgeons avoiding more complicated procedures, or a reluctance to innovate. A review undertaken following early publication of cardiac surgical outcomes found this to be unfounded (6). In any event this potential bias is addressed to some degree by the risk adjustment calculation applied to the data.

Where can I find this information?

Consultant Outcomes Data is currently available on the NHS My Choices Website (1) and on The Society of British Neurological Surgeons Neurosurgical National Audit Programme website (7).

References

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