

How do you pick your surgeon & Hospital?

Suddenly, unexpected if you are having heart attack, or if involved in major cardiac emergency you should go to nearest hospital you don't have a choice. Time is essence; it does make difference between life & death. Hopefully with luck you would get the best care. However roughly 90% of time heart surgery is not emergency, Patient & family will have enough time & opportunity to find out whether the hospital or the surgeon is right fit for them. There are certain things you could quickly look it to find out the information that you needed & that will make you feel comfortable regarding your decision.

Once you made the decision to undergo heart surgery, now how do you pick your surgeon? **WHO** is the surgeon going to do the surgery? Remember most of doctors are now employee of the hospital or in group practice contracted by hospitals. There is pressure, vested & financial interest to refer to in owns group or your hospital. Most of heart program had more than one surgeon & some of them many. You could find out about your surgeon by quickly looking the hospital directory under the physician profile or go to goggle information or on line state medical licensure board .You could able to find out his or her medical background such as, education, training, any expertise, accomplishment , number of law suits & numbers years in practice. Try to talk about him to hospital staffs, nurses, orderly, workers or neighbors who had recently gone treatment under his care. They are usually very cooperative, informative about it & they are usually helpful to family. If there are not willing to do it, could be red flag. What kind of reputation the surgeon has? Is available to take care after surgery? His technical ability? Is he slow, fast or sloppy surgeon?

His bedside manner, his post-operative care & follow up? Does the surgeon see the patient after the surgery or not to be seen? What about his complication rate, bleeding, infection, stroke & kidney failure? Lastly his outcome results especially mortality rate. Most of the time hospital advertises on the Hospital web information about Heart program; their surgeons & their accomplishment if the program is good. It is good business; it is bragging right and attracts more patients to the system. You should be able to find out most of this information before meeting the surgeon. If you don't have it, you could ask these questions to surgeon when you meet. I always provided to my patients if they needed it.

Once the decision is made that you need surgery & you are satisfied with surgeon you still need to ask certain questions,

WHY, WHEN & WHERE.

Why do I need surgery? Unnecessary surgery has serious consequences emotionally, physically & financially. He should be able to explain to you about natural history of disease, risks & benefits. For an example if you have triple vessel coronary disease with blockage of main coronary artery with weak pumping chamber or damage heart muscle your long term outlook is better with coronary artery bypass surgery(CABG); 5 years survival of 80% with better quality of life versus 30% survival with miserable life with no surgery. It is clear cut advantage to undergo surgery because better survival & quality of life. There are instances when there is no clear cut advantage of surgery versus medicine & then there might be other options. Sometime when you see the surgeon he gives surgical options only & pushes for surgery. Just like if you go to carpenter he will put some nails & screws. When, there is not compelling advantage with surgery you could always seek second opinion outside the system. I have dealt this many times, it made my life much easier & most of time patients have return back to

me for further treatment. You should also ask about other options such as minimum invasive procedure, stents versus standard procedure such as CABG, his or her experience & their recommendation under same circumstance.

Heart surgery is team work, outcome depends on team; the risk of surgery is surgeon & surgery related is about 60% ,the other remaining 40% is hospital related that means quality of support staffs, perfusionist, anesthesiologist, nurses, physician's assistant & ICU facility. You need to know who assist during surgery; it does make difference if the surgeon is young recent graduate you want somebody with experience to be there to fall back during surgery, in case there is problem or gives word of wisdom. Experience surgeon is supportive of care & experience prevents complications. I enjoyed such help in my practice, it did help me & my patient. It is not common to run trouble in the night of the surgery, however God shake if does happen who comes to take care of you? Another surgeon? When you are ready to be discharged what types of follows up or rehab. Program is available here. These are important information you need to know for peace of your mind. There are many more it is not possible go all over here.

Next question you need to ask **WHEN** I need surgery. There are cardiac situation where you need emergency open heart surgery, 5-10% because there is risk of death while waiting. This is national & my personal experience. The remainder could wait & have elective surgery. You could ask if there is any harm waiting for surgery till you straighten out your personal life & business. There are diseases where could delay the surgery for weeks to years without being hurt, on other hand sometime waiting too long becomes the risk of surgery become higher. In life you never know, at same time, there is risk of surgery. There are times I have seen it, surgeon pushes for early surgery either because

they are not busy enough, or because of financial gain or afraid that patient may go somewhere else. You have to be aware of such situations.

Lastly need to know **Which Hospital or WHERE** you going to have surgery. Some of the surgeons operates in multiple hospitals in the city, if so then ask why this place versus other. I personally never did surgery in multiple hospitals because it took my attention & presence away from the place where my patients are after surgery. I personally thought it was bad idea

Choosing the hospital doesn't have to be daunting task as long you have right information's & tools. When you able to plan ahead "Hospital compare" shall able to provide rating compare to other Hospitals in your area. The hospital compare is a web site that lets consumers compare the quality of hospital outpatient services, the site is hosted by the US Dept. of Health & Human Services (HHS). The leapfrog Hospital survey results can tell you a lot about a hospital, its safety & also quality of care such infection, errors, injuries & patient satisfaction. Nearly half of all US Hospitals voluntarily provide data to their annual survey & put the available to your fingertips. Choosing your Hospitals is a matter of personal preference but it can make difference between life & death. Remember 1 in 25 chance of leaving the hospital with new infection. We know 'A' Hospital do a better job preventing errors& infection. The safety grade ranks the hospital on list of medical care, such as hand washing, entering prescriptions through computer, readmissions, infections& having highly trained personals nurses, respiratory therapist & intensivists. Hospital safety grade search is tool to find the safest Hospital in your area. The information's are updated twice a year so that you & family can see your hospital compares on morbidity & mortality of certain high risk procedure. Medicare star system tells similar information's. National hospital

rankings for hospital are calculated using publically reported data downloaded for Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) hospital comparing web site. The hospital compare data set compares hospital- specific quality data for over 4500 hospitals nationwide. The quality data include clinical process of care, on time patient experience of care measures. They also rate hospital separately based on the performance on readmission & mortality. Remember many of the hospital advertise on TV's & newspaper to lure more business & patients, many times they tend to be exacerbated. It is also good to know whether the hospital is for profit or for nonprofit. You have to be careful, try to find about place by talking to the members of the community, patients who were treated recently, their experience as well as reputation of hospital in the community. The hospitals which provide, resident training program, heart surgery & transplants are usually gear with 24 hours good support system. There is lot of great doctors in small hospital & there are many average doctors in great hospital. Remember hospital is only brick & mortar, it is the people: their dedication makes difference in the quality of care & outcomes. You have to be lucky to find the right combination.

What patients could do waiting for surgery? If you come in better state of health for planned surgery your recovery will be faster & risk will be lower. Hospitals & doctors could do so much; patients have to take stake in their own health. If you are smoking, stop few months, if you are overweight try lose weight before surgery it will prevent lung complications, pneumonia. Better control of diabetes, high blood pressure, oral hygiene all these are important parts plays in your recovery & could be easily done. Lastly surgery is scary, risky & no body is looking forward get cut. Sometimes it is necessary, lifesaving & improves the quality of life. Try to come with positive attitude if you are depressed talk to another patient who had similar surgery; they are

very helpful & put your mind in peace or get Psych. help. Every patient need an advocate, who cares about you, involved in your care with doctors. Remember you are stressed, sick & scare: half of things they tell you, you don't hear or understand. Designate some family member or your close friend whom you trust as your advocate. Bring them with you when go to see your doctor or hospital. Your advocate will be talking & asking to hospital staffs & doctors. He will be vigilant about your care, avoids unnecessary errors & available to support emotionally.