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“Evaluating Management of National Cancer Institute Designated Cancer Centers.”

Cancer remains the second most common cause of death among Americans, claiming approximately 600,000 lives every year. For this reason, high-quality cancer treatment, research, and training is a top concern for healthcare and the entire nation. Since 1937, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) has been the federal government's principal agency for cancer research and training. Across the United States, 71 cancer institutions are supported by the NCI and have earned the title of NCI Designated Cancer Center. Recent research has proven that better management practices within healthcare institutions are correlated to improved patient outcomes in treating several morbid medical conditions. Accordingly, this study aimed to identify whether the NCI Designated Cancer Centers are well-managed to optimize cancer patient outcomes.

To gain insight into the performance of the NCI Designated Cancer Centers, we consulted healthcare ranking systems, which are the only publicly available performance evaluations. Apart from U.S. News & World Report, there are no direct performance evaluations of cancer centers themselves. However, there is information on the affiliated hospitals contained within each cancer center. We used data from four different healthcare ranking/scoring systems: U.S. News & World Report (USNWR), Newsweek, The Lown Institute (Lown), and Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade (Leapfrog). We first looked at the methodologies each ranking system employs and made a chart comparing their criteria. We then assembled a list of all the affiliated hospitals and cataloged their rankings and overall performance for each ranking system we included in our study. One key assumption is that higher-ranked hospitals will have better management, but best management practices are not specifically evaluated.

The results of comparing the criteria used by the ranking systems found that each includes some measure of patient outcome, operational efficiency and patient satisfaction. A key characteristic that differed among the ranking systems is whether the reputation of the hospital among physicians was accounted for. USNWR and Newsweek both included reputation as a significant measure in the overall score. Alternatively, Lown utilized a measure of the hospital's engagement with the surrounding community. Leapfrog was the only ranking system to include a measure of effective leadership, however, we found that an overwhelming majority of hospitals received perfect scores. Within the 71 NCI Designated Cancer Centers Lown ranked 96 hospitals, while Leapfrog, USNWR, and Newsweek ranked 69, 61, and 58, respectively. The data collected showed that the hospitals affiliated with NCI Cancer Centers fall within the higher ranks among all ranking systems. While this data points to the fact that cancer centers are well-managed, a cancer-specific management survey will be required to truly address our specific aim.