

Small Ohio town boasts most angioplasties

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The U.S. government and at least one major insurer are wondering why doctors in the small Ohio town of Elyria are performing so many angioplasties.

Statistics show that in Elyria Medicare patients with blocked coronary arteries are receiving angioplasty over drug therapy or bypass surgery at a rate that is nearly four times the national average, The New York Times reports.

While no one is accusing the doctors involved of wrongdoing, the question of whether angioplasty is the correct treatment is open to medical debate.

"People are rewarded for erring on the side of an aggressive, highly expensive intervention," says Dr. Elliott S. Fisher, a researcher at Dartmouth Medical School, which analyzed Medicare data from Elyria.

Medicare pays Elyria's community hospital about \$11,000 for an angioplasty involving use of a drug-coated stent. The cardiologist might receive \$800 for the work.

Because Elyria cardiologists are not surgeons, they must refer patients to another doctor if they conclude bypass surgery is needed.

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