

# Community hospitals offer a safe surgical option for some cancer surgeries

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Low-risk patients who require certain cancer surgeries can have the procedures performed with low operative mortality rates at community hospitals, according to a new study.

The research showed that for 13 different kinds of cancer surgeries such as gastric and colon, younger patients with few pre-existing illnesses survived operations at community hospitals at a similar rate as at cancer centers.

But patients who are considered high risk or who need complicated cancer surgeries have a higher survival rate at specialized cancer centers. Patients with pancreatic and esophageal cancer, among the most complex cancer surgeries, are twice as likely to survive an operation at a specialized cancer center. The study defined these centers as those designated as Comprehensive Cancer Centers by the National Cancer Institute and those that have the highest volume of specific cancer surgeries.

The study from Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine and the American College of Surgeons will be published in a future issue of the [Annals of Surgery](#) and is accessible via its Web site. The study measured the death rates (known as perioperative [mortality](#)) after surgery.

Lead author Karl Bilimoria, M.D., surgery resident at the Feinberg School and a research fellow at the American College of Surgeons, noted that the study does not look at long-term survival after surgery or factors

that affect long-term outcomes, such as whether surgery removed all of the cancer.

"There may be other reasons patients should be referred to specialized cancer centers beyond perioperative mortality," he said. Those reasons may include access to clinical trials and treatment options only available in an academic setting, state of the art technology and health professionals who specialize in a specific kind of cancer.

"Our findings provide new evidence about which patients need to be referred to a [cancer](#) center and which ones can have surgery in their own backyards," said Bilimoria. "This may make treatment more convenient for many patients. Sometimes it's prohibitively expensive for someone to travel to get care at a high-volume center. Patients also like to stay with their original doctors and close to their family."

Provided by Northwestern University

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