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DUMC: A Decade of Excellence

By Pat French

We've done it again! In the eleventh annual "America's Best Hospitals" rankings by the U.S. News & World Report, Duke University Medical Center placed sixth.

DUMC ranked sixth among the 173 hospitals that earned the highest scores in 17 specialties. That's down one from our ranking last year, but DUMC still scored among the top 10 in 10 specialty areas, and maintained or improved its ranking in 9 of 17 categories compared with last year.

The *USN&WR* ranks hospitals so that people can find the best options for certain areas of health care. The rankings are the only ones that reflect patient-care variables, such as nurse-to-patient ratios; professional reputation from board-certified specialists in each area; and fairly objective outcomes data, such as adjusted, specialty-specific death rates.

"The rankings are widely viewed in an area where there is very little comparative material," said Dr. James Jollis, Division of Cardiology. "Duke is one of the few hospitals with a strong focus on patient care. So we're kind of unique in that way."

It is difficult for patients to determine which hospital is best. As a result, reports such as this are helpful in that it educates them, in a comparative list, what hospitals have to offer.

The *USN&WR* began ranking hospitals in 1990. Then, they considered only 12 specialties and rated hospitals only by reputation. As noted, there now are 17 specialties, and two-thirds of the ranking reflects adjusted death rates and variables that measure quality of care. To be considered for ranking, hospitals must belong to the Council of Teaching Hospitals, be affiliated with a medical school, or have a minimum 9 of 17 critical technologies available.

Ranking also can reflect funding and research, particularly research funded by the government, says Jollis. Duke has an outstanding reputation for research and involvement in very important and large clinical trials. Unfortunately, this research is not often funded by the NIH or other government agencies.

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The accuracy of the rankings received some support from a study published last year in the *New England Journal of Medicine*: "Do 'America's Best Hospitals' Perform Better for Acute Myocardial Infarction?" The study examined the care and outcomes of elderly heart-attack patients admitted to high-ranking hospitals. The study concluded that patients at these hospitals had had lower 30-day mortality than patients at lower-ranked hospitals, and were more likely to receive the aspirin and beta-blockers recommended by current guidelines.

The Honor Roll below, of which DUMC is a member, represents the best of the "Best Hospitals." To be listed, hospitals had to rank high in at least 6 of 17 specialties.

DUMC's rankings, 1995 to 2000

Specialty	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
AIDS	14	18	18	*	*	*
Cancer	8	8	6	6	6	5
Cardiology	5	4	4	4	5	5
Endocrinology	13	14	14	9	15	14
Gastroenterology	6	6	8	9	9	8
Geriatrics	4	4	6	4	4	4
Gynecology	7	6	7	7	7	8
Nephrology	*	*	*	*	*	7
Neurology	11	8	8	8	11	11
Ophthalmology	10	9	9	9	9	10
Orthopedics	5	5	8	6	6	6
Otolaryngology	18	16	17	17	17	22
Pediatrics	NR	15	13	13	19	20
Psychiatry	11	12	12	13	11	9
Pulmonary disease	*	*	9	8	5	10
Rheumatology	6	6	9	10	11	10
Urology	6	7	6	5	5	6
Overall Rank	--	--	4	4	5	6

*Category not evaluated in these years.

The complete story of the rankings is available in the July 10 issue of USN&WR and at <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/nycu/health/hosptl/tophosp.htm>

The Honor Roll

1. Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore
2. Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota
3. Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston
4. Cleveland Clinic
5. UCLA Medical Center, Los Angeles
6. Duke University Medical Center
7. Barnes-Jewish Hospital, St. Louis, Missouri
8. Stanford University Hospital, Palo Alto, California
9. Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston
10. Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
11. University of California, San Francisco Medical Center
12. University of Michigan Medical Center, Ann Arbor
13. University of Washington Medical Center, Seattle
14. University of Chicago Hospitals
15. University of Pittsburgh Medical Center