

“I think people make way too much of ratings.”

—Walter Cronkite

Hospital Rankings

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Okay, I know you're not going to argue with Walter Cronkite. The man was a legend—the calm voice that told you EXACTLY what was going on in the world. Every evening. How many of us sat quietly in the phosphor-lit early evening watching the 6-o'clock news and having the world brought to us by Walter and his buddy, David Brinkley? I would have zero trouble telling anyone who might ask how I spent my early evenings during childhood; watching the news, obviously. So, when the man says ratings are overrated, he was on it.

But, here we are. I understand hospital ratings, as I do all ratings. People have to have some kind of ruler to measure things, whether those things be a new shirt or a place to go have a facelift. Dinner. Gall bladder removed. Car service. New hip. We are a service industry, right? And lord, am I sick of hearing that.

In radiology, our hospitals, our departments, and our own selves get rated, and we have imaging centers that get rated kind of like they rate fast food places. Were you quick in and out? Did everyone smile? Was the bill just right?

Well, I get my opinion (and not only do I get rated, but as a consumer of health care, I get to contribute to the scoring sometimes). I think it is overall a

flawed thing. Would you prefer a doctor who holds your hand and is nice to your family, smiles all the time and mismanages your infection and you die, or a doctor who is unpleasant, hard to contact, has an office staff that seemingly is so inept you're amazed they can tie their shoes in the morning, and then expertly manages your care and returns you to perfect (near perfect?) working order? And, yes, I know that is too simplistic. Or is it?

Ratings are flawed. Metrics can be manipulated. In the end, we all hope that we are doing our best, and that our hospitals/imaging centers/departments/and so forth are doing good work for people. I work at a hospital that I have complete and utter respect for. Not a perfect shop, but damned good. And, in case you're interested, we do well in ratings. I happily recommend people see physicians at my shop. And by and large, those people return to me with thanks and compliments about their care. That makes me happy.

We get ratings. People pay attention to them, for better or worse. Do people game the systems? You betcha. Are the systems sometimes unfair to people? You betcha.

Take it all with a grain of salt. And keep doing that good work. Mahalo.