

Does quality of care matter for French patients ?

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Abstract. Health Authorities in France recently produced and made publicly available a wide array of regularly updated hospital care quality measures (www.scopesante.fr). Economic theory applied to healthcare markets predicts that quality broadcasting should lead patients to make informed hospital choices, thus enhancing hospitals' vertical differentiation. However, patients rarely refer to technical quality information to choose between hospitals, preferring subjective appraisals such as doctors' referral and hospital reputation. Using a unique dataset about hospital (i) objective quality and (ii) subjective quality in France, we examine the relationship between hospital quality and hospital choice on several Medicine, Surgery and Obstetrics activities. We find that patients are increasingly willing to bypass the nearest appropriate hospital. However, they do not consider objective quality indicators to make informed choices, but rather informal information. Our results suggest that insofar, patients' hospital choices are not individual ones. French authorities have to find other ways to enhance hospital competition and lower patients' suboptimal choices.

Key words: Hospital choice, Hospital Quality and Safety Indicators, Hospital competition, Patients' empowerment

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