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Hospital Readmission Rates Drop After Joint Replacement Surgeries

AARP report: Decrease in hospital readmissions suggests Medicare's readmission reduction program is working even as joint replacement surgeries rise in popularity

WASHINGTON, DC — Even as the number of hip and knee replacement surgeries among adults age 50-plus rose dramatically between 2009 and 2013, the hospital readmission rates following these procedures fell by 20% or more. According to a new [AARP Public Policy Institute report](#), the primary driver for this drop was a substantial reduction in hospital readmissions among adults ages 65 to 84. This is the first study to look at the impact of the Medicare Hospital Readmission Reduction Program (HRRP) on unplanned hospital readmissions following joint replacement surgeries.

Joint replacement surgery was the most common hospital procedure covered by Medicare in 2013, accounting for nearly 450,000 inpatient admissions. The two most common reasons for hospital readmissions after knee or hip replacement surgery were complications from the joint implants and complications from the surgery itself. As more Americans age, the rate of these procedures is expected to rise dramatically.

“Knee and hip replacement procedures are increasingly popular among older Americans. We wanted to see whether readmission rates for these common surgeries went down in the years before the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) began fining hospitals for high readmission rates,” said Debra Whitman, PhD, AARP Chief Public Policy Officer. “Fewer hospital readmissions after major surgery like knee and hip replacements are good for both patients and the health care system.”

As part of the Affordable Care Act, CMS launched the HRRP in 2012. The program fines hospitals with excessive readmissions for Medicare patients with specific conditions. In 2014, CMS added elective hip and knee replacements to the list of conditions.

Key Findings

- Between 2009-2013, the number of adults ages 50-84 who had hip replacements increased by 73%, and the number of knee replacements rose by 46%.
- Between 2009-2013, the readmission rate for hip replacements fell by 20%, from 4.2% to 3.4.
- Between 2009-2013, the readmission rate for knee replacements fell by 23%, from 4.5% to 3.4%.
- By 2013, readmission rates following joint replacement among those ages 65-84 had fallen to the same levels as those ages 50-64.

Early evidence suggests that the Medicare's readmission reduction program is reducing hospital readmissions, according to Elizabeth Carter, Senior Health Services Research Advisor, AARP Public Policy Institute, and lead author of the report.

About the report

Impact of the Medicare Hospital Readmission Reduction Program on Hospital Readmissions Following Joint Replacement Surgery

AARP's Public Policy Institute conducted this study using the OptumLabs™ Data Warehouse. The retrospective administrative claims data utilized in this study include medical claims and eligibility information from a large national U.S. health insurance plan. The data were used to calculate rates of elective hip and knee replacement surgeries, length of hospital stays, and unplanned hospital readmissions within 30 days of surgery among adults ages 50-84. The data were for procedures completed between 2009 and 2013.

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About AARP

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of more than 37 million, that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities, strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities

and protection from financial abuse. We advocate for individuals in the marketplace by selecting products and services of high quality and value to carry the AARP name as well as help our members obtain discounts on a wide range of products, travel, and services. A trusted source for lifestyle tips, news and educational information, AARP produces AARP The Magazine, the world's largest circulation magazine; AARP Bulletin; www.aarp.org; AARP TV & Radio; AARP Books; and AARP en Español, a bilingual news source. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions to political campaigns or candidates. The AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. AARP has staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Learn more at www.aarp.org.

CONTACT:

Greg Phillips, 202-434-2560, media@aarp.org, [@AARPMedia](https://twitter.com/AARPMedia)

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