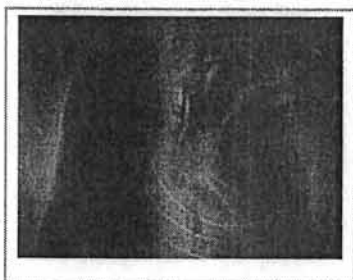


Heart attack mortality lower in America: study



CTV.ca News Staff

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Despite boasts of Canada's superior healthcare system, heart attack patients might wish they were sick in the United States. That's because a new study suggests U.S. patients fare much better than their northern neighbours.

Based on a comparison of the health records of 23,105 U.S. and 2,898 Canadian heart attack patients in the 1990s, the study published in the next edition of *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*, concludes that Americans have a marked survival advantage.

"The five-year death rate was 19.6 per cent among U.S. patients and 21.4 per cent among Canadian patients," lead author Dr. Padma Kaul said in a statement.

Although that difference appears small, the researchers warn that, when taken in the context of the 75,000 Canadians who suffer heart attacks each year, it could mean a significant number of lives.

"After adjusting for differences in patient characteristics, we found that Canadian patients' risk for dying was 17 per cent higher compared to U.S. patients."

According to the University of Alberta assistant professor, the difference is easily explained.

"Once we adjusted for whether patients had revascularization procedures or not, that difference disappeared."

Revascularization refers to aggressive surgical interventions such as angioplasty, which inserts a metal stent to reopen narrowed blood vessels, or coronary bypass surgery, which replaces them.

American patients are three times more likely to undergo an angioplasty, and more than four times as likely to have a bypass, compared to their Canadian counterparts.

In Canada, the study found patients are more likely to be discharged with less invasive procedures such as beta blocker therapy or the administering of clot busting drugs.

"While the United States and Canada share a common border, these two countries differ substantially in how they organize, deliver and pay for health care," Kaul said.

"The Canadian system is very centralized and we have fewer centres that provide revascularization services.... We have a hub-and-spoke kind of design where we bring all the patients to central centres where the procedures are done, whereas the U.S. has much more dispersed facilities across the country."

Another study funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Heart and Stroke Foundation recently found that the rate of revascularization procedures varies countrywide.

Alberta and British Columbia recorded the highest incidences, with 36 and 32 per cent of patients undergoing revascularization within a year of their heart attack, respectively.

On the other end of the spectrum, Prince Edward Island had the lowest rate, at six per cent.

Because the Canadian approach correlates to a higher mortality rate, the authors of the latest mortality study say their conclusions "have important policy implications for cardiac care in countries and healthcare systems wherein use of invasive procedures is similarly conservative."

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