[Transparency of medical quality data. Ethical obligation to deliver or instrument to create unfair competitive advantage?]

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Annually about 100,000 acute cardiac deaths occur in Germany. For this reason, there is the obvious need, from a public health perspective, to inform the population about possible measures of their prevention and treatment. Ultimately every patient or admission referring doctor can be thought of as a recipient of "marketing". Other than within the context of economics, in medicine the subject of marketing is likely to produce a negative response. Any doctor engaging in marketing is quickly considered to be engaging in unfair competition at the expense of colleagues ("economic competitors"). However, despite some reservations it would seem sensible to provide transparency concerning the results of treatment. If the manner of competition is the right one, i.e. one that has as its aim to improve patient care, it can at the same time improve such care, motivate doctors and frequently also reduce costs. Transparency of the various aspects of improved medical care in this way represent a "pay-back" to everyone working in the health services. It is desirable to establish an external process of assessing any published data and, as far as possible, exclude all incorrect data from relevant measures of comparison. Competition can then be to the patient's benefit.

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