

THE SOCIETY OF THORACIC SURGEONS

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IMPORTANT – PLEASE READ

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Dear STS National Database Participant:

A composite quality measure has been developed for The Society of Thoracic Surgeons' National Adult Cardiac Surgery Database, and participants are receiving their quality score ratings with this semi-annual report. We anticipate that sites receiving the highest rating (3 stars) may logically be inclined to inform the medical community and the public of their success in this area.

This composite measure represents new ground in the assessment of clinical performance, and the STS Board of Directors has adopted this policy statement to provide guidance to those surgeons and hospitals participating in the Database who wish to report their composite quality ratings publicly .

The policy document titled, "Guidelines on Use of STS National Database and Database-derived Information," states that "participants are encouraged to report their own statistics and outcomes in comparison with the STS national mean or average as a benchmark assessment." The policy statement also strongly advocates reporting of sustained trends over time rather than "snapshots" that may be misleading.

In keeping with this policy, participants may report their quality ratings if they are based on data covering at least one year. The inclusive dates of data collection must be specified prominently in conjunction with the rating. While participants may compare their quality ratings with national aggregate data, they must not make direct comparisons with other hospitals or practices.

The following is an example of an acceptable statement: "The Society of Thoracic Surgeons has recently developed a comprehensive rating system that allows for comparisons regarding the quality of cardiac surgery among hospitals across the country. Approximately 15% of hospitals received the "3 star" rating, which denotes the highest category of quality. In the current analysis of national data covering the period from January 1, 2006 through December 31, 2006, the cardiac surgery performance of our hospital was found to lie in the highest quality tier, thereby receiving an STS 3 star rating."

Direct hospital-to-hospital comparisons are considered inappropriate. Such comparisons, or any false or misleading uses of STS quality ratings, may lead to STS disciplinary action. In that regard, it should be noted that any or all of the surgeons comprising the "Surgeon Participant" will be considered responsible for public uses of quality ratings data made by them, their group or the hospital associated with their participation in the Database.

STS leadership applauds those select sites receiving the 3 star designation. It is anticipated that the same high standards of professionalism responsible for such *clinical* excellence will also be demonstrated by the *ethical* manner in which this achievement is shared with the public.

Handwritten signature of John E. Mayer, Jr., MD in black ink.

John E. Mayer, Jr., MD
President

Handwritten signature of Fred H. Edwards, MD in black ink.

Fred H. Edwards, MD
Chair, Workforce on National Databases