Commentary: Shaking Trees, Falling Apples

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Central Message: Reporting outcomes and extrapolating these results to judgements on quality in congenital heart surgery is complex.

Central Picture Legend: Christopher E. Mascio, MD

In their manuscript “Comparing Apples to Apples: Exploring public reporting of congenital cardiac surgery outcomes based on common congenital heart operations”, Nathan et al propose a method to present outcomes to patients and families (1). They advocate reporting what they state parents desire – specific diagnosis & procedure cohorts.

The authors examine 19 common operations at 9 different centers and Tables 3 and 4 show these results. It can be argued that these tables promote comparisons that may or may not be valid.

The debate surrounding reporting and transparency is certain to continue as the particular methodology in this manuscript continues to mature.

Quality is a challenging entity to grasp or measure. In a famous pornography case, Justice Potter Stewart stated, “I shall not today attempt to further define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description…But I know it when I see it…” (2).

The best system to evaluate quality has yet to be determined, but we will know it when we see it.
References

