



Total Joint Replacement Surgeon Choice: A qualitative analysis in a Medicare population

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Background

- There are few studies on how patients choose their joint replacement surgeons
- Joint replacement surgery is of interest because:
 - Elective in nature
 - Expected increase demand
 - Outcomes vary among white and non-white patients
- Important to consider how patient preferences play a role in choosing surgeon

Objectives

- To identify the factors influencing the choice of joint replacement surgeon amongst a diverse group of patients

Methods

- Design: Qualitative study
- Inclusion Criteria:
 - Age > 45
 - Primary knee or hip replacement at at two institutions between 2016-2017
 - Medicare status
 - Letter mailed with call back number
- Data Collection:
 - Semi-structured interviews (N=38)
 - Recorded and transcribed
- Analysis
 - Qualitative analysis using a structured coding scheme to extract key themes
 - Conventional content analysis
 - Coding categories derived from data
 - Content and face validity:
 - Themes were reviewed by all authors until consensus was formed around key themes

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Results

	N (%)
Age	
<65	6 (16)
65-70	6 (16)
71-79	19 (50)
≥ 80	7 (18)
Hospital	
Academic	20 (53)
Community	18 (47)
Gender	
Women	20 (53)
Men	18 (47)
Race	
White	26 (68)
Black	6 (16)
Hispanic	4 (11)
Asian	2 (5)
Education	
Less than high school	3 (8)
High School	3 (8)
Some College	10 (26)
Bachelor's Degree	9 (24)
Graduate Degree	13 (34)
Surgery	
THA	19 (50)
TKA	19 (50)

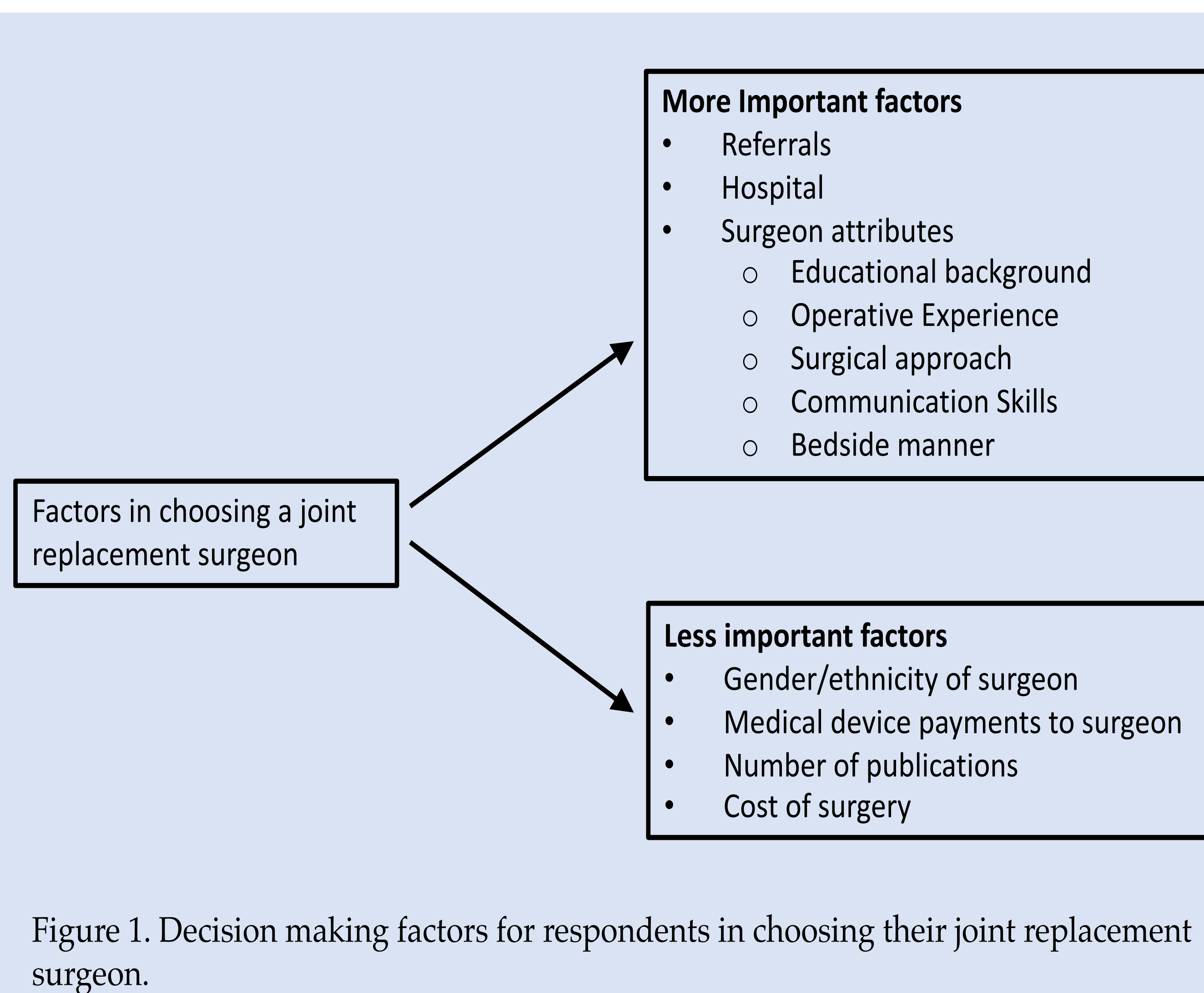


Figure 1. Decision making factors for respondents in choosing their joint replacement surgeon.

Table 2. Summary of key themes related to joint replacement surgeon choice

Systems attributes	Responses
Referrals	Highly regarded opinions of primary care physician, other physicians, family, friends
Hospital	Important factors included hospital reputation, proximity, staff friendliness, facilities
Insurance coverage	High importance of in-network surgeons
Gender / ethnicity of surgeon	Not important, commented on lack of diversity
Industry payments	Mixed positive and negative thoughts regarding industry payments to physicians
Number of publications	Not important, valued experience and ability to keep up with field
Cost	Patients covered by Medicare, cost was not a factor in choosing surgeon
Surgeon attributes	Responses
Surgeon background	Emphasis on education and training
Prior experience with surgeon	Satisfaction with prior surgery
Operative experience	High operative experience
Surgical approach	Considered anterior vs posterior approach in hip arthroplasty
Communication skills	Ability to communicate medical information at a level that a patient could understand; repertoire with patient
Bedside manner	Highly important

Discussion

- Factors in choosing TJR surgeon:
 - MD referral/recommendation appears to be strongest factor
 - MD experience and communication was an important factor
 - Gender/race/academic prestige play little to no role
 - Cost is not a consideration in this Medicare population
 - Patients largely unaware of industry payments to physicians

Conclusions

- Our study is one of the largest and most diverse qualitative studies aiming to understand how patients choose their surgeon
- Understanding how patients choose their TJR surgeons is important in healthcare in order to improve access and quality of care to historically underserved groups.
- Future studies should aim at understanding how physician referrals influence patient care and clinical outcomes

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