Eye of the beholder?: A prospective study examining the correlation between patients’ and surgeons’ subjective assessment of surgical frailty
Daniel J Canter, MD, Louis Revenig, MD, Kenneth Ogan, MD, FACS, David A Kooby, MD, FACS, Shishir Maithel, MD, FACS, John F Sweeney, MD, Juan M Sarmiento, MD, FACS, Yuan Liu, PhD, Sungjin Kim, MS, Viraj A Master, MD, PhD, FACS
Emory University, Atlanta, GA and Urologic Institute of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Elkins Park, PA and Fox Chase Cancer Center, Philadelphia, PA

INTRODUCTION: Surgical decision-making inherently relies on subjective judgments by the physician and patient. In this study, we sought to examine the concordance between patient and surgeon perceptions of the patient’s “fitness” prior to surgery. We then correlated these ratings with the patient’s objective frailty scores (FS).

METHODS: Patients were prospectively enrolled from urology, general surgery, and surgical oncology clinics. Patients were asked to rate their ability to withstand the physical stress of the scheduled surgery on a visual analog scale. The operating surgeon then independently rated his assessment of the patient’s ability to withstand surgery blinded to the patient’s self assessment. These ratings were correlated with patients’ objective FS.

RESULTS: 203 patients were included. Median patient age was 62 (range=21-87) years; the majority of patients were white (67%) and male (60.6%). A patients’ self-assessment showed no correlation with their age (Spearman Correlation = 0.083, p-value = 0.239), however surgeons’ ratings showed a positive correlation with patient age (SC = 0.334, p < 0.001). Patients’ self-rated scores showed a positive correlation with their frailty score (SC = 0.338, p < 0.001), although surgeons’ ratings showed a stronger correlation (SC = 0.405, p < 0.001). However, when stratified by age group, the positive correlation and predictive ability were lost (p-value = 0.198).

CONCLUSIONS: Our data demonstrate surgeons may inappropriately use age as a surrogate for an objective measure of patient physiologic reserve. Conversely, patients tended to overestimate their ability to withstand the stress of surgery, possibly leading to unrealistic expectations of their recovery and outcomes.