
Case: Shouldice Hospital—A Cut Above

“Shouldice Hospital, the house that hernias built, is a converted country estate which gives the hospital ‘a country club’ appeal.”

A quote from *American Medical News*

Shouldice Hospital in Canada is widely known for one thing—hernia repair! In fact, that is the only operation it performs, and it performs a great many of them. Over the past two decades this small 90-bed hospital has averaged 7,000 operations annually. Last year, it had a record year and performed nearly 7,500 operations. Patients’ ties to Shouldice do not end when they leave the hospital. Every year, the gala Hernia Reunion dinner (with complimentary hernia inspection) draws in over 1,000 former patients, some of whom have been attending the event for over 30 years.

A number of notable features in Shouldice’s service delivery system contribute to its success: (1) Shouldice accepts only patients with uncomplicated external hernias, and uses a superior technique developed for this type of hernia by Dr. Shouldice during World War II. (2) Patients are subject to early ambulation, which promotes healing. (Patients literally walk off the operating table and engage in light exercise throughout their stay, which lasts only three days.) (3) Its country club atmosphere, gregarious nursing staff, and built-in socializing make a surprisingly pleasant experience out of an inherently unpleasant medical problem. Regular times are set aside for tea, cookies, and socializing. All patients are paired up with a roommate with a similar background and interests.