Post-Divorce Hospital Rankings: And the winner is .... Methodist
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The Texas Medical Center boasts some of the nation's great specialty hospitals -- the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Texas Children's Hospital, the Texas Heart Institute, Menninger (Psychiatric Clinic) and The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research.

But for the previous 19 years U.S. News & World Report put out its oft-criticized but highly influential rankings of the nation's best hospitals, no general-care adult hospital at the medical center ever made it into the magazine's "honor roll" of the nation's most elite, hospitals such as the Mayo Clinic and Johns Hopkins and Massachusetts General. It was a blight on the largest medical complex in the world's bid to also be the best.

Texas Medical Center, where rankings are king

Methodist Hospital still isn't breathing the exact same rarefied air as those institutions, but it finally broke through in the magazine's 2009 rankings out today, placing 20th in the magazine's honor roll and ranking in 15 of 16 specialty categories. It is the honor roll's only hospital without a nearby affiliated medical school, a distinction many thought would doom such ambitions. One expert said last year that in trying to become an academic hospital unto itself, Methodist was attempting what no hospital has ever achieved.

The ranking demonstrates how Methodist has thrived since its 2004 split from Baylor College of Medicine, whose subsequent financial struggles have led to merger negotiations with Rice University -- negotiations complicated by Baylor's lack of an affiliated adult private hospital to generate revenue. Methodist, meanwhile, becomes the U.S. News & World Report honor roll's only hospital in the southernmost third of the country from Arizona to Florida.

There was no let-up for the medical center's renowned specialty hospitals, all of which retained their high status in the rankings -- M.D. Anderson was No. 1 for cancer, Texas Heart Institute No. 5 for heart and heart surgery, Menninger No. 9 for psychiatry and TIRR No. 4 for rehabilitation. Texas Children's made the the magazine's alphabetically listed honor roll of 10 best children's hospitals.

Methodist's ascension provides a possible coda to one telling chapter in the Baylor-Methodist saga. Just before the divorce, aware its increasingly unhappy partner was being wooed by St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, Methodist offered the highly ranked medical school a bonus of $7 million to stay if it could improve the hospital's U.S News & World Report ranking. Baylor rejected the offer, but five years later Methodist could
brag it managed the feat without the school made famous by pioneering heart surgeon Michael DeBakey.

Still, Methodist's victory isn't likely to settle the matter in some minds. People still hoping for the divorcees to get back together are sure to ask, wouldn’t a Rice-Baylor-Methodist partnership catapult all three institutions to an even higher stratosphere in the rankings?