

Study finds large number of people die due to avoidable medical errors

Written by Australian Business

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When people require medical care, they must place a certain amount of trust in the physician providing their care. By doing so, they rely on the doctor's expertise to ensure they receive a proper standard of care and the appropriate treatment. Unfortunately, physicians do not always live up to our expectations and, in some cases, make errors that can lead to lifelong problems for the patient or even death.

According to a recent study published in the Journal of Patient Safety, the number of people who are harmed -- known as suffering an adverse event -- as a result of a physician's negligence is much higher than previously believed.

In the past, researchers have pointed to a study conducted by the Institute of Medicine in 1999 when citing statistics regarding preventable errors in hospitals. That study estimated that approximately 98,000 people die annually as a result of errors made in hospitals.

The recent study made significant changes to those estimates. According to the new data, anywhere from 210,000 to 440,000 patients in the hospital die each year as a result of preventable errors.

The researchers based their estimates on data compiled in four separate studies. Those studies examined information from over 4,200 hospital patients from 2002 to 2008. The studies revealed that 21 percent of the patients suffered adverse events while in the hospital, while another 1.4 percent of the patients died as a result of preventable errors.

As there were approximately 34 million instances in which individuals were hospitalized in 2007, the researchers concluded that avoidable mistakes lead to a minimum of 210,000 fatalities each year. The researchers believe the number is actually much higher, as certain errors -- such as missed diagnoses, in which treatment is not provided -- often go unreported.

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Protect yourself from serious medical errors

While physicians have a responsibility to provide appropriate care, you can take certain steps to protect yourself when receiving medical treatment. For instance, when you receive a diagnosis, make sure you understand how the doctor reached that conclusion. Never be afraid to ask questions to ensure you comprehend the physician's suggestions for ongoing care. In addition, if the diagnosis will result in serious medical care or you feel uncomfortable with the diagnosis for any reason, consider obtaining a second opinion.

If you or a loved one has suffered harm as a result of a negligent physician, seek the advice of a skilled personal injury attorney to ensure your rights are protected.