

**THE COST OF BAD MEDICINE**

The cutting edge of patient safety today is doctors who are figuring out the cost of bad medicine.

In a study by several doctors and their Ph.D. colleagues entitled Death By Medicine, the following annual physical and economic costs of medical intervention was accumulated.

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Deaths</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Adverse Drug Reactions	106,000	\$12 billion
Medical Error	98,000	\$2 billion
Bedsore	115,000	\$5 billion
Infection	88,000	\$5 billion
Malnutrition	108,800	-----
Outpatients	199,000	\$77 billion
Unnecessary Procedures	37,136	\$122 billion
Surgery-Related	32,000	\$9 billion
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>783,936</b>	<b>\$282 billion</b>

The number of unnecessary medical and surgical procedures performed annually is 7.5 million. The number of people exposed to unnecessary hospitalization annually is 8.9 million. The table above shows the number of deaths caused by medicine to be 783,936. "It is evident that the American medical system is the leading cause of death and injury in the United States," according to the doctors.

Simply entering the hospital can result in the following:

- 1) In 16.4 million people, 2.1% chance of a serious adverse drug reaction, 1 (186,000)
- 2) In 16.4 million people, 5.6% chance of acquiring a nosocomial infection, 9 (489,500)
- 3) In 16.4 million people, 4-36% chance of having an iatrogenic injury in hospital (medical error and adverse drug reactions), 16 (1.78 million)
- 4) In 16.4 million people 17% chance of a procedure error, 40 (1.3 million)

The physicians who authored the study believe that as few as 5% and only up to 20% of physician caused acts are ever reported. Dr. Lucian Leape in 1994 said the figure of 180,000 medical mistakes annually was equivalent to three jumbo-jet crashes every two days. The more up-to-date by the team of doctors and Ph.D.s who examined the situation finds that the equivalent of six jumbo-jets are falling out of the sky each and every day.

A 2002 study shows that 20% of hospital medications for patients had dosage mistakes. Nearly 40% of these errors were considered potentially harmful to the patient. In a typical 300-patient hospital, the number of errors per day were 40.38.

A major problem is pharmaceutical companies advertising directly to the public. The majority of money spent by pharmaceutical companies for advertising is related to seductive television ads. From 1996 to 2000, spending rose from \$791 million to nearly \$2.5 billion. Even though \$2.5 billion is a lot of money, it only represents 15% of the total pharmaceutical advertising budget.

The physicians who authored Death By Medicine addressed infections in Part II. For example, analysis of records from 2002 reported 103,000 cases of death due to hospital infections, 75% of which were preventable. The National Committee for Quality Assurance in September of 2003 reported that at least 57,000 people die annually from lack of proper care for common diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart disease. An October 8, 2003, Journal of the American Medical Association study from the U.S. Government's Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality documented 32,000 mostly surgery-related deaths costing \$9 billion in accounting for 2.4 million extra days in the hospital in 2000. The physician authors also examined bedsore. Over 1 million people develop bedsores in U.S. hospitals every year. The cost of care as a result of bedsores is \$55 billion. Bedsores are preventable with proper nursing care. 50% of those affected are in a vulnerable age group of over 70. "In the elderly, bedsores carry a four-fold increase in the rate of death." The mortality rate in hospitals for patients with bedsores is between 23% and 37%.

The General Accounting Office which is a special investigative branch of Congress, gave citations to 20% of

the nation's 17,000 nursing homes for violations between July 2000 and January 2002. Many of the violations involved serious physical injury and death.

A report from the Coalition for Nursing Home Reform notes that at least one-third of the nation's 1.6 million nursing home residents may suffer from malnutrition and dehydration, which hastens their death.

The present cost of nosocomial infections may be in the order of \$5.5 billion according to the doctors. Nosocomial infections are those contracted in the hospital.

According to Dr. Barbara Stearfield in a Journal of the American Medical Association paper, the United States ranks 12<sup>th</sup> out of 13 countries in a total of 16 health indicators. Japan, Sweden and Canada were first, second and third. More than 40 million people have no health insurance and between 20-30% of patients receive contraindicated care. According to another author, the cost of medically caused errors is staggering not just in financial terms.

116 million extra physician visits  
77 million extra prescriptions  
17 million emergency department visits  
8 million hospitalizations  
3 million long-term admissions  
199,000 additional deaths  
\$77 billion in extra costs

The doctors conclude that "when the number one killer in society is the healthcare system, then that system has no excuse except to address its own urgent shortcomings. It's a failed system in need of immediate attention."

These figures are consistent with information received by the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. The Authority created in March of 2002 has recorded 154,000 incidents and serious events in a year while the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has recorded only 1% of those ever resulted in litigation.

Clearly, a case could be made to the fact that not nearly enough people are compensated for the bad medical care they receive.

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