



## OPTIONS CENTER HEALTH TOPIC

### Problems with Pharmaceuticals

Ever since the ground-breaking report on medical errors by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) was published, there have been high hopes that the health care system would be forced to confront the crisis in patient safety. The report showed that hundreds of thousands of people are injured yearly, and more than 100,000 are killed by doctors and prescription drugs.

Instead of tackling the problem head on, organized medicine has chosen to try to debunk the IOM report as grossly exaggerated. This in effect denies that the problem even exists and ensures that nothing will be done to protect you.

How bad is it? The IOM estimates that up to 100,000 people are probably killed outright yearly by drugs and doctors. The numbers of severely injured or maimed are massively higher. And these numbers are **grossly underestimated** for several reasons. First of all these are patients injured **only in hospitals**. Private care is not counted. The estimates count on hospitals for keeping records and reporting mistakes. Anyone who has ever worked in a hospital knows that this is a joke.

If you or your doctor thinks that "a joke" is too strong a statement, remember the Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). They are trying to get a handle on the number of hospital infections in the U.S., estimated to be at least **2 million** with more than **90,000 deaths**. Hospital reporting is **voluntary**, like almost all other hospital reporting responsibilities. Here comes the joke – since its inception in 1996 there have been **a total of ten reports** of hospital infections voluntarily reported to the JCAHO by hospitals!

Secondly many people decline or are incapable of responding to inquiries about their doctor- or drug-induced injuries. The truly sick patients are too ill to complete the reporting procedure – being too ill to speak for 10 to 20 minutes, or having been readmitted to the hospital. Then there are the people who have died from their injuries who never make the statistics.

### ***Just in Medicare***

Attitudes about doctors and hospitals are amazing to say the least. Most people and doctors believe the accurate number of people killed by doctors and drugs to be around 5,000 each year! Compare this just to Medicare numbers. In a study by the Massachusetts Medical School, reported in the March 3, 2003 *JAMA*, colleagues reviewed the experiences of 27,000 seniors in Medicare.

They found 1,523 adverse drug reactions with a third serious, and about half preventable. The extrapolation of this study shows that as many as 180,000 life-threatening or fatal adverse drug events occur yearly **in the Medicare population alone**. The fact that most people believe that a total of 5,000 people are killed each year by docs and drugs is testament to the amazing public relations efforts of organized medicine.

In yet one more study from Harvard School of Public Health and reported in the December 12, 2002 *NEJM*, 1,207 people and physicians were surveyed about their attitudes regarding medical errors. Almost half reported a medical error in their family, with half reporting a serious or deadly error. Extrapolated out, this would account for hundreds of deadly or life-threatening errors each year!

- Excerpted from Dr. Bruce West  
- *Health Alert Newsletter*

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