

Doctors Are the **Third** Leading Cause of Death in the US, Causing **250,000 Deaths** Every Year

Take a good look at our health care methods—How close are they to nature? A sick person needs quiet rest and loving care—have you found that in any hospital recently? The only sleep you can get is if you are knocked out with drugs!

This article in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) is the best article I have ever seen written in the published literature documenting the tragedy of the traditional medical paradigm.

This information is a follow-up of the [Institute of Medicine report](#) which hit the papers in December of last year, but the data was hard to reference as it was not in peer-reviewed journal. Now it is published in JAMA which is the most widely circulated medical periodical in the world.

The author is Dr. Barbara Starfield of the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health and she describes how the US health care system may contribute to poor health.

ALL THESE ARE DEATHS PER YEAR:

- **12,000 -- unnecessary surgery** [8](#)
- **7,000 -- medication errors in hospitals** [9](#)
- **20,000 -- other errors in hospitals** [10](#)
- **80,000 -- infections in hospitals** [10](#)
- **106,000 -- non-error, negative effects of drugs** [2](#)

These total to **250,000 deaths per year from iatrogenic causes!!**

What does the word iatrogenic mean? This term is defined as induced in a patient by a physician's activity, manner, or therapy. Used especially of a complication of treatment.

Dr. Starfield offers several warnings in interpreting these numbers:

- First, most of the data are derived from studies in hospitalized patients.
- Second, these estimates are for deaths only and do not include negative effects that are associated with disability or discomfort.
- Third, the estimates of death due to error are lower than those in the IOM report.[1](#)

If the higher estimates are used, the deaths due to iatrogenic causes would range from 230,000 to 284,000. In any case, 225,000 deaths per year constitutes the third leading cause of death in the United States, after deaths from heart disease and cancer. Even if these figures are overestimated, there is a wide margin between these numbers of deaths and the next leading cause of death (cerebrovascular disease).

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Another analysis ¹¹ concluded that between 4% and 18% of consecutive patients experience negative effects in outpatient settings, with:

- 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 high cost of the health care system is considered to be a deficit, but seems to be tolerated under the assumption that better health results from more expensive care.

However, evidence from a few studies indicates that as many as 20% to 30% of patients receive inappropriate care.

An estimated 44,000 to 98,000 among them die each year as a result of medical errors.²

This might be tolerated if it resulted in better health, but does it? Of 13 countries in a recent comparison,^{3, 4} the United States ranks an average of 12th (second from the bottom) for 16 available health indicators. More specifically, the ranking of the US on several indicators was:

- 13th (last) for low-birth-weight percentages
- 13th for neonatal mortality and infant mortality overall [14](#)
- 11th for postneonatal mortality
- 13th for years of potential life lost (excluding external causes)
- 11th for life expectancy at 1 year for females, 12th for males
- 10th for life expectancy at 15 years for females, 12th for males
- 10th for life expectancy at 40 years for females, 9th for males
- 7th for life expectancy at 65 years for females, 7th for males
- 3rd for life expectancy at 80 years for females, 3rd for males
- 10th for age-adjusted mortality

The poor performance of the US was recently confirmed by a World Health Organization study, which used different data and ranked the United States as 15th among 25 industrialized countries.

There is a perception that the American public "behaves badly" by smoking, drinking, and perpetrating violence." However the data does not support this assertion.

- The proportion of females who smoke ranges from 14% in Japan to 41% in Denmark; in the United States, it is 24% (fifth best). For males, the range is from 26% in Sweden to 61% in Japan; it is 28% in the United States (third best).

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- The US ranks fifth best for alcoholic beverage consumption.
- The US has relatively low consumption of animal fats (fifth lowest in men aged 55-64 years in 20 industrialized countries) and the third lowest mean cholesterol concentrations among men aged 50 to 70 years among 13 industrialized countries.

These estimates of death due to error are lower than those in a recent Institutes of Medicine report, and if the higher estimates are used, the deaths due to iatrogenic causes would range from 230,000 to 284,000.

Even at the lower estimate of 225,000 deaths per year, this constitutes the third leading cause of death in the US, following heart disease and cancer.

Lack of technology is certainly not a contributing factor to the US's low ranking.

- Among 29 countries, the United States is second only to Japan in the availability of magnetic resonance imaging units and computed tomography scanners per million population. 17
- Japan, however, ranks highest on health, whereas the US ranks among the lowest.
- It is possible that the high use of technology in Japan is limited to diagnostic technology not matched by high rates of treatment, whereas in the US, high use of diagnostic technology may be linked to more treatment.
- Supporting this possibility are data showing that the number of employees per bed (full-time equivalents) in the United States is highest among the countries ranked, whereas they are very low in Japan, far lower than can be accounted for by the common practice of having family members rather than hospital staff provide the amenities of hospital care.

[Journal American Medical Association](#) 2000 Jul 26;284(4):483-5

DR. MERCOLA'S COMMENT:

Folks, this is what they call a "Landmark Article". Only several ones like this are published every year. One of the major reasons it is so huge as that it is published in JAMA which is the largest and one of the most respected medical journals in the entire world.

I did find it most curious that the best wire service in the world, Reuter's, did not pick up this article. I have no idea why they let it slip by.

I would encourage you to bookmark this article and review it several times so you can use the statistics to counter the arguments of your friends and relatives who are so enthralled with the traditional medical paradigm. These statistics prove very clearly that the system is just not working. It is broken and is in desperate need of repair.

Doctors are Third Leading Cause of Death

I was previously fond of saying that drugs are the fourth leading cause of death in this country. However, this article makes it quite clear that the more powerful number is that doctors are the third leading cause of death in this country killing nearly a quarter million people a year. The only more common causes are cancer and heart disease.

This statistic is likely to be seriously underestimated as much of the coding only describes the cause of organ failure and does not address iatrogenic causes at all.

Japan seems to have benefited from recognizing that technology is wonderful, but just because you diagnose something with it, one should not be committed to undergoing treatment in the traditional paradigm. Their health statistics reflect this aspect of their philosophy as much of their treatment is not treatment at all, but loving care rendered in the home.

Care, not treatment, is the answer. Drugs, surgery and hospitals are rarely the answer to chronic health problems. Facilitating the God-given healing capacity that all of us have is the key. Improving the diet, exercise, and lifestyle are basic.

Effective interventions for the underlying emotional and spiritual wounding behind most chronic illness are also important clues to maximizing health and reducing disease.

Medical Mistakes Kill 100,000 Americans A Year

The promise every doctor makes is "First, do no harm." But doctors and hospitals do make mistakes. And the November 30 shocking report from the Institute of Medicine showed medical mistakes are a common and potentially life-threatening risk. If medical mistakes counted among the leading causes of death in America, they would be eighth.

Surgical gaffes like amputating the wrong foot or a deadly chemotherapy overdose make headlines. But patients may never hear of the more subtle errors, like a delay in diagnosis or testing that costs precious time to fight off disease. Medical mistakes costing lives. Medical mistakes are a stunningly huge problem, says a new report by the Institute of Medicine. It quoted studies estimating that at least 44,000 and perhaps as many as 98,000 hospitalized Americans die every year from errors. To put that into sharper and more alarming perspective, even the lower figure of 44,000 deaths exceeds the number of people who die each year either on the highways, of breast cancer or of AIDS.

It is an intolerable situation, especially when it's taking place in the United States, which leads the world in medical advances. The cause, according to the Institute of Medicine, is not as much recklessness on the part of doctors, nurses and other health providers as it is basic flaws in the way hospitals, clinics and pharmacies operate. That kind of problem is fixable.

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As a matter of fact, safeguards have already been implemented to reduce the likelihood of such lethal medical errors. Some hospitals are now using computerized prescriptions to ensure that pharmacists don't misread doctors' scrawled prescriptions. At the urging of anesthesiologists, anesthesia equipment is being standardized. And the Food and Drug Administration is trying to reduce confusion by ensuring that the names of new drugs don't sound too similar to drugs already on the market.

Doctors' notoriously poor handwriting too often leaves pharmacists squinting to decipher a dose C was it 10 milligrams or 10 micrograms? C or even the name of the prescribed drug. Too many drug names sound confusingly alike. Consider the painkiller Celebrex and the anti-seizure drug Cerebyx; or Narcan, which treats morphine overdoses, and Norcuron, which can paralyze breathing muscles.

But far more is needed: a concerted and comprehensive effort to raise the bar on consumer safety in the health care industry, not unlike what has already taken place in other industries. Since many doctors already feel beleaguered by financial constraints imposed on their care, insurers and health maintenance organizations must also bear the burden of improving safety.

At a minimum, the Institute of Medicine wants to reduce medical errors by half within five years. Considering the number of people who die each year in hospitals - where they presumably go to get better - even that goal may be too conservative.

Keeping Up with Changes

Health care is a decade behind other high-risk industries in improving safety, the report said. It pointed to the transportation industry as a model: Just as engineers design cars so they cannot start in reverse, and airlines limit pilots' flying time to keep them rested, so can health care be improved. Some fixes already are under way: Some hospitals have computerized prescriptions. The Food and Drug Administration is hunting ways to catch sound-a-like drugs.

Anesthesiologists persuaded many manufacturers to standardize equipment and thus decreased technology-caused errors. Many doctors now literally mark the spot of surgical incisions before patients are put to sleep, so everyone agrees on what will be cut.

Changes Coming from Congress

The Institute of Medicine is part of the National Academy of Sciences, a private organization chartered by Congress to advise the government on scientific matters. Congress just passed legislation ordering the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research to hunt strategies to reduce medical mistakes. The bill will even change the name to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to reflect the emphasis. President Clinton is expected to sign the bill soon. But the Institute of Medicine said reducing medical mistakes requires a bigger commitment.

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It recommended that Congress should establish a federal Center for Patient Safety. It would require \$35 million to start and should eventually spend \$100 million a year in safety research.

The report said the total cost of medical mistakes, lost income and production, cost of disability and health care, totals \$17 to 29 billion a year.

And that's not mentioning the human toll. The government should require that hospitals, and eventually other health organizations, report all serious mistakes to state agencies so experts can detect patterns of problems and take action. About 20 states now require error reporting.

But how much and what penalties they impose varies widely. State licensing boards and medical accreditors should periodically re-examine health practitioners for competence, stressing safety practices. Standardized medical equipment and treatment guidelines can help doctors keep up. Change the "culture of secrecy" that surrounds medical mistakes, encouraging doctors to discuss errors as well as near misses so problems are fixed.

But is there something you can do, even from your sickbed, to protect yourself?

Become an Expert

First, know what ails you. Ask your doctor all about it. Research it on the Internet, for instance. Patients should feel entitled to inquire about their care no matter how sick they are. Second, know about your drugs. The study shows more than 7,000 die each year because of medication errors.

Kohn L, ed, Corrigan J, ed, Donaldson M, ed. To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 1999

Doctors:

The Third Leading Cause of Death

Dr. Barbara Starfield of the John Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health reports that conventional medical doctors cause 250,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. This figure represents the third leading cause of death in America, after cancer and heart disease. It may be a gross underestimation of the true numbers of people killed each year by doctors.

The study was published in JAMA, the Journal of the American Medical Association, the most widely circulated peer-reviewed medical journal in the world.

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Of these deaths,

12,000 were due to unnecessary surgery;

7,000 to medication errors in hospital;

20,000 to other hospital errors;

80,000 to infections acquired in hospitals;

106,000 from the negative effects of correctly prescribed and taken drugs. (JAMA, July 26, 2000)

Zoltan Rona, MD, MSc: "The technical term for doctor-caused illness is 'iatrogenesis,' a rather sanitized and harmless sounding word. I submit that a better, more accurate term for this carnage would be genocide. There is something deeply and seriously wrong with a profession whose leaders are quite content to criticize and attack natural therapies in the guise of 'protecting the public,' while turning a blind eye to the slaughter of millions by 'proven' conventional medicine.

"The next time a doctor tells you that taking vitamins is dangerous, mention this study and the fact that, according to U.S. poison control centers, vitamins, minerals, herbs and other natural remedies kill no one year after year."

**"Nearly all people die of their medicines, and not of their illnesses."
Molliere**

HEALTH FRAUD?

We keep hearing about government and medical association backed programs to combat health fraud. I am against health fraud and I am sure every person here is against health fraud. But if you are going to be against health fraud, be against it in all aspects, not just health food stores, nutritionists and natural healers. I would like to read to you a transcript aired Feb. 23,24,25, &27 1986 on TV in St. Paul's Minnesota, KSTP- entitled, "Too Quick to Cut." This information came from a government study that said every year in the USA 10,000 lives are lost because of it and \$4 billion wasted as 2 million surgical operations are performed NEEDLESSLY! I say, there is more health fraud in that one paragraph than is committed by the whole alternative healing industry!

There is a man who wrote a book called 'Hospital Hazards' The author states that each year, at least 100,000 lives are lost because of hospital acquired infections. This

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same topic was aired on Donahue. But according to the article in a Minneapolis paper, this is not so. Two doctors from the University of Minnesota, who think they are as good as the Mayo clinic, probably they are, I don't know, wrote an article and said there are 75,000 lives lost because of hospital infections. So, somewhere between 75,000 and 100,000 must be the answer.

And what about all this wonderful research on cancer- Are they doing a good job there? An article in Business-week Sept. 1986 headlines "The New War on Cancer" That's right folks- the New War because we lost the old one. Read the first line of this article- " 15 years and 13 Billion Dollars after USA declared war on Cancer, the progress is still grim." That was taxpayer's money given to the National Cancer Institute, and doesn't include what was given to the American cancer society or other private institutions that are in cancer research.

Cancer is **BIG BUSINESS!** Are you really naive enough to **BELIEVE** that they **WANT** to cure it???