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Washington state bill seeks consumer accountability for medical licensing board

Washington state lawmakers have proposed a bill that would give more rights to people who file licensing complaints alleging medical mistakes. Up to now, when something terrible happens to a patient in a hospital or under a doctor's care, families often file complaints with the Medical Quality Assurance Commission (MQAC) - the state's medical disciplinary board - but hear nothing for months or even years, only to finally be told that the official finding is "insufficient evidence" or "no cause for action."

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Not surprisingly, this leaves many families wondering if the physician and/or hospital have covered up what really happened to the patient.

Last year, nearly 1,400 Washington families filed complaints with the MQAC. Like most state medical boards, the MQAC typically closes most without action - of the 1,400 complaints, 950 were investigated and disciplinary action taken in only 94 cases, says its legal manager, Michael Farrell. Current Washington state law doesn't require MQAC to divulge evidence during investigations or to detail its reasoning, Farrell says, and for the most part, it doesn't.

But Lisa McGiffert, director of Consumers Union's Safe Patient Project, a national patient-safety effort, says that "many patients who file complaints end up getting frustrated because they feel like their report disappears into a bureaucratic black hole." Under the proposed law, which has already been passed by the House and is currently before a Senate committee, patients would have a "better opportunity to be heard."

The proposed law, which is being touted as model legislation for other states, would require a health profession's disciplinary board to promptly respond to complainants' queries about the status of an investigation, provide copies of files on request once a case is closed and, when deciding whether to reconsider its original finding because of new evidence, provide an explanation of its reasoning. For the first time, families would be given the right to tell board members how they've been affected - in writing or in person and before a case is closed - and recommend sanctions.

Source: [The Seattle Times](#)

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