

Lab Errors: These Mistakes Can Be Deadly

By [Catherine Bertram](#) - 08/09/2010

An [article](#) in the Boston Globe last week, by Jonathan Salzman, reports that a lawsuit has been filed by a patient who had surgery to remove his prostate after being told that he had prostate cancer. Our blog mentioned this case last week. The surgery left him incontinent. Tragically, he did not have prostate cancer. It was a lab error. The lab technician mistakenly mixed up his results with that of another patient. As a result, this patient had a surgery he did not need and must now wear adult diapers and live with the consequences.

Another patient reportedly had an eight month delay in the treatment of his prostate cancer due to a lab mix up. He was told he was cancer free but that was incorrect. He actually had cancer and was not treated for eight months.

The article reports that by the time he was informed of the mix up the cancer had spread to his lymph node.

Lab errors can be devastating to patients and can negatively impact the patient's chances of survival and require additional treatment. We have this type of cases pending right now and we have the experience to understand how hospitals should label and track these types of results and what safety measures should be put in place to avoid these tragic occurrences.

About the author:

[Catherine Bertram](#) is board certified in civil trials and was recently nominated as a 2010 Super Lawyer for Washington, D.C. Ms. Bertram has 20 years of trial [experience](#) and is unique in that she was formerly the Director of Risk Management for Georgetown University Hospital. Ms. Bertram is a member of the bar for the U.S. Supreme Court. She is a partner with the firm and lectures regularly to lawyers and health care providers, nationally and locally, regarding patient safety, medical negligence and other related issues. She has also recently published a chapter in a surgical textbook. She can be reached by email at cbertram@reganfirm.com or by phone 202-822-1875 in her office in Washington, D.C.