



Safer Patients Mean Fewer Malpractice Suits

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Could it really be this simple? If doctors and hospitals quit making so many medical errors there would be a decrease in the number of medical malpractice lawsuits? Wouldn't this solution be much better for society than artificial caps on damages for the victims of medical malpractice?

An article in [HealthDay](#) says that as medical errors decreased in California, so did the number of medical malpractice claims. Wouldn't this hold true in other states as well? Here are excerpts from the article:

A decrease in preventable patient injuries in California hospitals from 2001 to 2005 coincided with a drop in malpractice suits against doctors, a new study has found.

"These findings suggest that putting a greater focus on improving safety performance in health care settings could benefit medical providers as well as patients," lead author Michael Greenberg, a behavioral scientist at the Rand Corporation, said in a news release. Rand is a nonprofit research organization. The study was released April 15 on the group's Web site.

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The researchers analyzed 2001-05 data and found that there were about 365,000 adverse events among patients, such as post-surgical problems and hospital-acquired infections, and about 27,000 malpractice suits in California during that time.

The study found a significant association between the annual number of safety lapses that put patients at risk in each county and the number of malpractice claims. A model created by the researchers showed that a county with 10 fewer adverse events in a year would have 3.7 fewer malpractice claims during that year.

Counties in the state also showed considerable variation in both the frequency of the safety lapses and of malpractice claims.

The study is the first to show a connection between improved performance on 20 well-established indicators of patient safety and fewer malpractice claims, according to the researchers.