



Posted On: **December 6, 2010** by [Patrick A. Malone](#)

Baltimore Malpractice Cases Raise Broad Questions about Heart Stents

With lucrative fees for doctors, little oversight, and much disagreement about who needs stents in their heart arteries, it was perhaps inevitable that malpractice allegations of unnecessary surgery would explode into hundreds of lawsuits against a single cardiologist in Baltimore.

But now a new report from the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, which oversees the federal Medicare program, says the Maryland cases against Dr. Mark Midei may be only the tip of a very large iceberg.

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Medicare spends \$3.5 billion a year on cardiac stents, the tiny wire mesh tubes that are intended to prop open clogged arteries feeding the heart muscle.

In a long story in the [New York Times](#), Dr. Steven Nissen, chief of heart medicine at the Cleveland Clinic, said:

"What was going on in Baltimore is going on right now in every city in America. We're spending a fortune as a country on procedures that people don't need."

Dr. Nissen said he routinely treats patients who have been given multiple unneeded stents by other doctors.

I wrote about unnecessary cardiac procedures in my patient safety newsletter last summer. You can [read it here](#).

A good resource for readers is the Harvard Medical School [newsletter](#) on cardiac care. The bottom line for most patients, the Harvard doctors say, is that if you're not having symptoms, you should be very wary about anyone proposing to put stents in your heart.

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