

NEW MEXICO INJURY ATTORNEY BLOG

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Hospital Survival: The Numbers

The debate over healthcare reform always eventually leads eventually to the evil of trial attorneys. It has become a mantra of any self respecting conservative politician that medical malpractice lawsuits are crippling the healthcare system while victimizing the good doctors and nurses around the country who strive only to serve the public good.

Having read some of the statistics on medical errors, it is frivolous medical malpractice lawsuits are pure myth.

Looking into it further, to be sure, I came across a cite to a 2007 article from USA Today entitled "Patient Protect Thyself" by Liz Szabo. I googled the title, and surprisingly numerous articles came up with similar names.

Interestingly, there were also a number of self-help guides written so that patients and their families could protect them from harm at the hands of doctors, nurses and staff during a stay in the hospital. USA Today had such an article as did Reader's Digest which is not known for its liberal bias.

So the question arises if these and other news outlets have seen fit to publish guides for patients to protect themselves against medical errors and negligence, how big is the problem and how big is the myth? The answer is BIG! Frighteningly so for anyone facing hospitalization. Here are some of the numbers from the USA Today article:

- A Harvard School of Public Health study found that 34% of all people, and 50% of those with chronic conditions, report that they or a family member have experienced a medical error.
- The Institute of Medicine estimates that hospitalized patients will suffer at least one medication error per day during a hospital stay.
- It is estimated that as many as 98,000 Americans die each year as a result of medical error. By contrast, 58,148 soldiers died during the entire Vietnam War from 1958 to 1973.

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- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, close to 2 million patients per year catch an infection in the hospital and nearly 90,000 die, while it is estimated that only about 35% of hospital employees consistently wash their hands before contact with a patient.

These statistics are pretty sobering. How do you survive these odds? USA Today and others have created checklists. Basically, it is up to you. The medical profession has come to the conclusion that it is the patient that must take the initiative to protect him or herself. It is hard to know what to think of these conclusions and even more difficult to reconcile these conclusions with Tort Reform arguments.

A few of the more surprising survival skills needed to survive a hospital stay in American will be addressed next. I caution you in advance, the helpful survival tips provide little comfort to those facing a hospital stay, and raise even more questions regarding the claims of medical malpractice litigation abuse by the Tort Reformers.

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