

## **Reduce Your Chances of Becoming A Victim of Medical Malpractice**

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Medical malpractice is a blanket term used to describe inadequate medical and nursing care that unnecessarily injures patients. Such malpractice is more than a mere mistake by a doctor; it is more than a nurse simply being human. It reflects care below accepted community standards (commonly referred to as “negligent care”).

There are a variety of wrongful acts that caregivers commit that constitute medical malpractice, ranging from carelessness to placing profits over people. Unfortunately, care sufficiently poor to constitute medical malpractice is not rare; nor is it a creation of greedy lawyers or money-seeking complainers. Rather, 1 of every 7 patients who enter the hospital, according to Harvard Medical School, suffers care sufficiently poor to be seen as negligent.

The toll of malpractice on individuals, their families and society is enormous. A national study on the subject demonstrated that medical malpractice each year causes more deaths than automobile accidents, breast cancer and AIDS combined.

What can you and your family do to avoid becoming part of this horrific statistic? There are several effective things you can do to reduce the risk:

1. In General -- Be a squeaky wheel. Ask pointed questions to your doctors and insist on answers. Don't accept pat answers that don't stand up to simple scrutiny. Do a little research so that you can discuss your diagnosis with your doctor. Make sure you understand the details of your doctor's plan for your treatment.
2. Hospitalizations – If you must receive care in a hospital, ask someone reliable to be with you, and to be there as often as possible (particularly at times that you may be unconscious or sedated). This person will act as your advocate - - your eyes and ears -- making sure that everyone is correctly following your treatment plan.
3. Urgent Care Clinics – Despite their misleading name, “urgent care” clinics are rarely particularly qualified to treat actual emergencies. These facilities generally fall into three categories: (1) offices for physicians that have difficulty generating sufficient business based on their own name and reputation; (2) after-hour clinics hoping to siphon off emergency room business; and (3) a vehicle for HMO's to save money by re-directing their patients from the more expensive care of the emergency room.

If you have what you consider to be a medical emergency, go to a quality emergency room. Do research to identify the emergency room you plan to use BEFORE the emergency occurs.

4. Prescriptions – Medical care often consists, at least in part, of patients being given medicines by a prescription. Unfortunately, the errors in filling these often-illegible physician scribbles are epidemic. At every link in the chain, check the accuracy of your prescriptions, and make sure what was intended for you is what you actually receive from the pharmacy.

5. Health Maintenance Organizations (“HMO’s”) – Unless you believe in free lunches, avoid choosing “managed care” providers (often referred to as HMO’s) if you can. There is an inherent flaw in such managed care. Unlike the traditional medical system, the more care managed care providers give you, the more money it costs them. That is, they receive the same pre-paid flat fee regardless of whether they give you a ton of care or no care at all.

Instead of subscribing to an HMO, search for quality doctors with privileges to admit their patients to a quality hospital, and who receive a fee that depends on the services they provide. Then obtain insurance accepted by this doctor. They will then be economically motivated to provide you excellent care rather than profiting from giving you less attention.