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When hospitals make mistakes with medications, they rarely tell the patient



Keith Srakocic/Associated Press - Patients are often not told about medication errors in hospitals, study says.

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By Reuters,

Patients and their families are rarely told when hospitals make mistakes with their medicines, according to a new study.

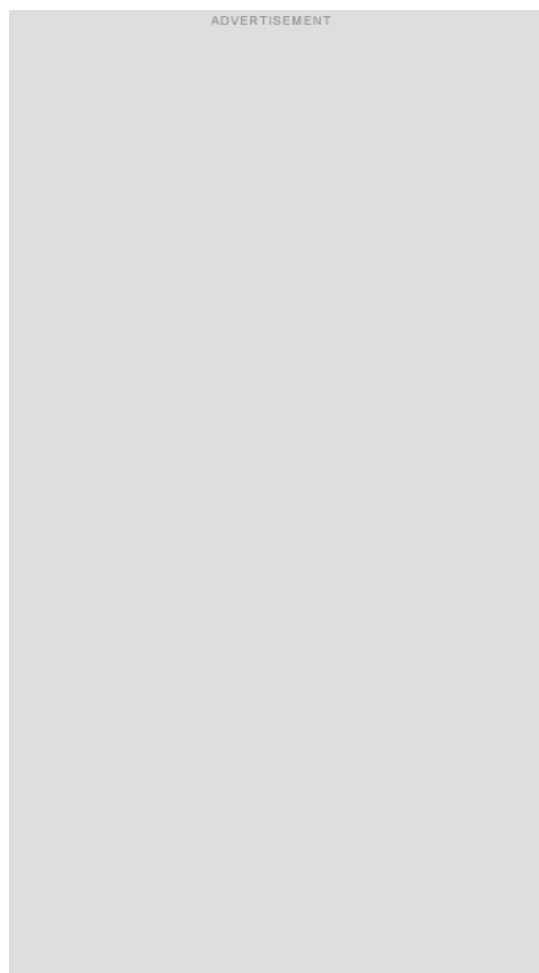
Most medication mistakes did not harm patients, the researchers found, but those that did were more likely to happen in intensive care units. And ICU patients and families were less likely to be told about errors than patients in other hospital units.

"For the most part, our findings were in keeping with what the existing literature tells us about the where and how of medication errors in a hospital," wrote Asad Latif, an assistant professor at Johns

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Study says patients often are not told about medication errors in hospitals

Reuters

Mistakes are more likely to happen in intensive care units than in other parts of a hospital.

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Your child has a bad cold and feels awful? Cold meds don't really help.

Howard J. Bennett

Don't bother reaching for cold medicines for your sick child; they probably won't help.

- What cold medicines contain
- Check back Jan. 15 at noon for our live chat

Cold medicines contain antihistamines, decongestants, etc.

Howard Bennett

The chemical names of some ingredients in oral cold medicines.

Hopkins University School of Medicine and the study's lead author, in an e-mail. "The most surprising finding was what we do about them, at least in the immediate time around when they occur."

Using a database of about 840,000 voluntarily reported medication errors from 537 U.S. hospitals between 1999 and 2005, the researchers found that ICUs accounted for about 56,000, or 6.6 percent, of the errors.

The vast majority of the mistakes — about 98 percent — didn't lead to a patient's being harmed, but those that did were more likely to happen in the ICUs, the researchers reported in the journal Critical Care Medicine.

Of errors that may have led to patient deaths, 18 occurred in ICUs and 92 in non-ICU areas of the hospital. In ICUs and non-ICUs, errors of omission — failing to give a patient the medication — were most common. Harmful errors most often involved devices such as intravenous lines and mistakes in calculating medication dosages.

More than half of the time, no actions were taken after an error. In fact, only a third of the hospital staff who made the reported mistakes were immediately told about their errors.

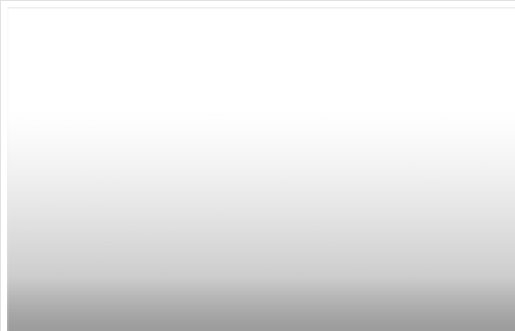
"And the patient and/or their family is immediately informed when an error occurs barely two percent of the time, despite literature supporting full disclosure and their desire to be promptly informed," Latif said.

— Reuters

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Cold medicine for a sick child? Don't bother.

Live Q&A transcript
Pediatrician Howard J. Bennett discussed common colds and the medicines that will and won't give relief.

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12:00 PM Cold medicine for a sick child? Don't bother.

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