

HeraldTimesOnline.com

First state report shows 77 serious hospital errors

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March 6, 2007

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) - Indiana hospitals and surgery centers reported 77 serious medical errors in 2006, according to a preliminary report released Tuesday by the state Department of Health.

The report shows 23 cases of severe bed sores, 21 cases of leaving a foreign object in a surgery patient and six deaths or serious disabilities from medication errors. Nine surgeries were performed on the wrong body part, and two were performed on the wrong patient.

The mistakes are rare considering the overall number of medical procedures, officials said. Indiana hospitals and surgery centers logged more than 1.7 million surgical procedures in 2005, and there were 3.7 million patients discharged from hospitals.

But the serious mistakes included in the report should never happen, advocates said.

"Any one person harmed by medical care is one too many," said Betsy Lee, director of the Indiana Patient Safety Center.

Health officials said more medical errors could be reported to the Department of Health by June 30, when the reporting period for 2006 ends. The department plans to issue a final report in August.

State Health Commissioner Judy Monroe predicted that the number of reported errors would rise over the next few years as hospitals learn more about logging such mistakes.

"We are requiring health care providers to report errors not to punish them, but instead, to help to improve patient safety," she said.

Gov. Mitch Daniels, who issued an executive order in 2005 requiring hospitals to start reporting medical mistakes, said only a fraction of the medical errors that occurred in Indiana may have been recorded this year.

"It's a new system," he said. "Not every facility got up to speed as fast as some."

Indiana's Medical Error Reporting System tracks 27 types of mistakes — including deaths from medication errors, surgeries on the wrong person or body part, patient suicide attempts and releasing infants to the wrong people.

Indiana is only the second state — Minnesota was the first — to adopt a medical error reporting system based on the 27 mistakes. In Minnesota, the number of reported mistakes has increased each year since the system started in 2003.

Health officials cautioned that mistakes reported at individual hospitals may not be able to tell a patient much about a particular facility because serious mistakes are so rare. Monroe suggested that patients ask their doctors and nurses about common hospital problems, such as bed sores, and find out how they are trying to prevent them.

The most reported errors came from the hospital with the most patients and the most surgical procedures: Clarian Health Partners, a large organization that includes Methodist, Indiana University and Riley Hospitals. The hospitals recorded more than 100,000 surgical procedures in 2005 and reported a total of 15 medical mistakes in 2006.

Clarian Health Partners' report included four deaths or serious disabilities associated with medication. Three premature infants died at Methodist Hospitals in September 2006 after an overdose of blood thinner.

Kenneth Stella, president of the Indiana Hospital and Health Association, said the preliminary report released Tuesday can help hospitals share information to help prevent medical mistakes.

"Gathering the data is only a first step in the improvement process," he said.

On the Web:

The report, which includes the number of mistakes made by individual hospitals, will be available online at the Indiana Department of Health: <http://www.in.gov/isdh>

Errors reported statewide:**SURGICAL ERRORS**

- Surgery performed on the wrong body part: 9
- Surgery performed on the wrong patient: 2
- Wrong surgical procedure performed on a patient: 3
- Retention of a foreign object in a patient after surgery: 21

PRODUCT PROBLEMS

- Death or serious disability associated with contaminated drugs or devices: 1
- Death or serious disability associated with misuse or malfunction of device: 2

CARE MANAGEMENT

- Death or serious disability associated with medication error: 6
- Death or serious disability associated with hypoglycemia (low blood sugar): 1
- Stage 3 or 4 pressure ulcers (severe bed sores) acquired after admission: 23

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Death or serious disability associated with a burn: 2
- Death associated with a fall: 4

CRIMINAL

- Sexual assault of a patient on the facility grounds: 2
- Death or injury of patient or staff from physical assault occurring on facility grounds: 1

NO PROBLEMS

- The report also includes several categories that showed no errors reported. Those categories include: infant discharged to wrong person, patient suicide or suicide attempt resulting in serious disability, abduction of a patient and death or serious disability associated with restraints or bedrails.

Source: Indiana Medical Error Reporting System, preliminary report 2006.