



# ADVANCED BODY DYNAMICS

Wellness Care & Sports Medicine

## LATEST ESTIMATE FOR MEDICAL ERRORS SETS COSTS AT THE \$1.5 BILLION MARK

The latest medical error cost figures have just been released. Incredibly, the cost of potentially preventable surgical errors in the United States is now recorded at almost \$1.5 billion annually.

This astounding total comes from estimated figures released in July by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). It represents the additional costs for medical services that are passed along to employers and their healthcare providers.

- Two categories of additional care required accounted for the major recipient of extra care dollars. Researchers found the insurers' average payment for acute respiratory failure totaled \$28,218, which added 52 percent more to medical costs. Next were post-operative infections, which required \$19,480 additional dollars for a total of 48 percent higher costs.
- When medical errors occurred, nursing costs rose as well by \$12,196 for a 33 percent cost increase. Metabolic problems such as kidney failure or uncontrolled blood sugar contributed \$11,797 in added dollars for a 32 percent increase.
- Next came the additional care and handling associated with blood clots, vascular problems and pulmonary difficulties. This total came to \$7,838 at 25 percent more. Open wounds associated with errors added \$1,426 or 6 percent more.

The research work was conducted by the AHRQ's William E. Encinosa and Fred J. Hellinger, both PhDs. Results of their study were published in the journal *Health Services Research*. AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D. said, "Like the physical and emotional harm caused by medical errors, the financial consequences don't stop at the hospital door. Eliminating medical errors and their after effects must continue to be top priority for our healthcare system."

Also mentioned in this study was the fact that 1 out of every 10 patients who died within 90 days of their surgery did so because of preventable error. Of these, one-third occurred after discharge from the hospital. These figures came from a nationwide sample of 161,000 employer-insured patients age 18 to 64 that had surgery in 2001 and 2002.

Medicare has announced that as of October 2008, it will discontinue certain payments to hospitals for preventable medical error. It will be interesting to see how placing the financial burden on hospitals for post-error handling affects the number of surgical errors in this country.

Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. "New AHRQ Study Finds Surgical Errors Cost Nearly \$1.5 Billion Annually." July 2008. <http://www.ahrq.gov/news/press/pr2008/surgerrpr.htm>

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