



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks  
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.  
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## "Hospitals Can Either Cure You or Kill You"

As if there is not enough for patients to worry about, new data is indicating that there could be 180,000 deaths per year as a result of hospital mistakes. We already have to worry about breathing pollutant-containing air, eating mercury laced fish, consuming harmful processed sugar, ingesting saturated fats in meats, buying trans fat-containing snack foods, gulping down any type of fast (so-called "junk") food, popping antioxidant vitamins and drinking water with hidden contaminants of hormones, drug residues, pesticides or herbicides. Additionally, we turn an ear of caution to the nearly unrestrained marketing from pharmaceutical companies, which produce the drugs that are responsible for the 106,000 annual deaths from adverse reactions to medications. Yet, hospitals appeared to be a bastion of safety and security from the harms of the world and illness, but that may not be the case. According to a new federal government study, hospital care-related problems contribute to the deaths of about 15,000 Medicare patients each month or 180,000 annually. They claim that, "One in seven patients suffers harm from hospital care, including infections, insulin-mismanagement, over-sedation, excessive bleeding from blood-thinning drugs, and bed sores." In another one in seven patients, temporary harm occurred but was detected in time and corrected. Peter Pronovost of Johns Hopkins University, co-author of the book, *Safe Patients, Smart Hospitals*, said, "Medical mistakes are an enormous public health problem."

In the America that I love, we are becoming more aware that we must be a responsible party in monitoring our own healthcare, both in and out of the hospital. It appears that, if you or a loved one is hospitalized, it is becoming increasingly important to help monitor medications and tests. We need to help avoid wrong drugs, dosages, needless tests or duplication of testing. Many current medications for treating cancer, diabetes, depression and heart disease can have serious or lethal side effects. CAT scans can increase the incidence of cancer and radiation exposure. Make sure that all are necessary. I point these things out, not to tear down our system of healthcare, but to improve it. I have spoken critically of the upcoming Obama-care and it is my firm belief that things are not going to get better. I have spoken of the crisis with the dwindling numbers of primary care physicians and this is also going to intensify. We are entering a time whereby we must become an active participant in monitoring the course of our healthcare and we must be coordinated with our doctor. We can no longer be "carried by the stream" or afraid to speak up but must pay attention to our fate and our healthcare future. After all, it is truly "a matter of life and death."

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