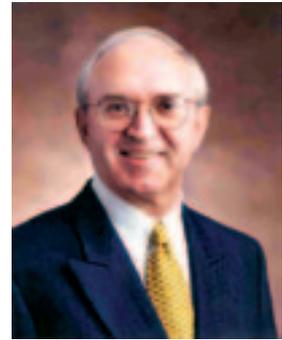


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Medical Error in Clinical Practice

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To err is human and inevitable - “errare humanum est” - and physicians, as human beings, make mistakes that might have a negative impact on a patient’s health. This is an important fact that clinicians should realize from the beginning of their careers. This brief report outlines the principles that should be applied in daily clinical practice in order to minimize medical errors.

While medical technology can improve the efficiency of a patient’s care, the physician, when applying technology, should not lose contact with the patient and treat only the laboratory findings; the patient should always be at the center of all activities. It should be emphasized that most diagnostic and therapeutic techniques are not perfect and often a combination of diagnostic tests and therapeutic interventions may be required. Medical literature typically summarizes the diagnosis and management of patients within an individual disease. The physician, however, cares for an individual patient.¹ It should be mentioned that in biology dissimilarity and not similarity is the rule. All people are equal before the law. This is not the case in biology. The individual patient of whom the physician takes care may have an atypical clinical picture, multiple diseases, and so on. The description of these patients cannot be found in the books. In these instances, the physician, besides his scientific knowledge, should use common sense and clinical experience.² In medicine, at any particular time and any medical center, there are certain established rules on which daily practice is based. The physician should not deviate from these common rules. Any deviation may have catastrophic results. Medical de-

isions should always be made with the patients’ best interest in mind; physicians should not compromise and change their professional opinion when under pressure for political or various other reasons. Governments, politicians, sociopolitical parties come and go. The clinician’s concern must remain with the patient.

Medical error in very important persons (VIPs)

Deviation from these basic rules in daily clinical practice is the main reason why mistakes often occur in the treatment of physicians, their families and VIPs. The medical care of a VIP should not be inferior but as good as the care of other patients. A deviation from the basic principles of practicing medicine in order to provide more comfort to a sick VIP is a serious mistake which may lead to multiple errors with unpredictable consequences (“No people do so much harm as those who go about doing good” - Bishop Mandell Creighton).

“The most fruitful lesson is the conquest of one’s own error. Whoever refuses to admit an error may be a great scholar but he is not a great learner” - Goethe. Clinicians make mistakes. When physicians make mistakes, other individuals get hurt. This matter of suffering as a result of clinicians’ errors is an important issue in medical care, education, and training, with community-wide, individual, ethical, social and legal consequences. Physicians should recognize their mistakes, and learn from them. Physicians who have made a mistake should be encouraged to report and discuss their mistake with the appropriate personnel. Training programs, hospitals and other medical care facilities should have procedures for identifying and analyzing the circumstances under

which a medical error occurred.³ Constructive criticism and suggestions are important. The purpose is not to penalize the person who made the mistake but to avoid similar mistakes in the future. As the ancient Greeks used to say “*το δις εξεμαρτείν ουκ ανδρός σοφού*” - committing the same mistake twice is not the act of a wise man.

References

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