Parents fear errors during children's hospitalization

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Nearly two-thirds of parents reported they felt the need to watch over their child's care to ensure that medical errors are not made during their hospital stay, according to a study led by Beth A. Tarini, M.D., M.S., assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Michigan Medical School.

In particular, parents whose first language is not English were more likely to report the need to be vigilant about their child's care.

This is the first study to document parental concerns about medical errors during a child's hospitalization.

Researchers also found that parents who were more confident in communicating with physicians were less likely to be concerned about medical mistakes.

"We need to address parents' concerns about errors and find ways to make them feel comfortable talking to us about their child's care," Tarini says. "Parents are an underutilized resource in our efforts to prevent medical errors."

This study, which appears July 30 in the *Journal of Hospital Medicine,* surveyed 278 parents of children who were hospitalized at the Children's Hospital & Regional Medical Center in Seattle, Wash., in 2005.

Medical errors are linked to between 48,000 and 98,000 deaths a year,

according to the Institute of Medicine, and are linked to increases in length of stay, health care costs and death. Doctors and hospitals have focused on processes and hospital systems as a way to prevent medical errors, but little work has been done in investigating the experiences of patients and their potential role in preventing errors.

The Joint Commission and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality currently recommend that parents help prevent errors by becoming actively involved and informed members of their health care team and taking part in every decision about their child's health care.

This study is an important step toward characterizing the scope of parental concern about medical errors during pediatric hospitalizations and understanding its relationship toward communication between parents and physicians, Tarini says.

Devising a quality initiative program to improve parents' confidence interacting with doctors may help to temper parents' concerns about medical errors while also encouraging their involvement in their child's medical care, the researchers suggest.

Source: University of Michigan Health System (news : web)

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