

Report: Drug errors common, at times fatal

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Every day one hospital patient is the victim of at least one drug overdose or medication mistake, a national report says.

The report, released Thursday by the independent Institute of Medicine, found 1.5 million people were harmed by medication errors in an average year, with more than half of the injuries in nursing homes.

While most drug errors are not fatal, the report estimates they cost \$3.5 billion annually. Drug mistakes can cause everything from rashes to death from overdoses of chemotherapy.

A 1999 report, "To Err Is Human," blamed 7,000 deaths a year on errors in medication.

"We need to wake up and take this more seriously and then everyone can play a part," Albert Wu, professor of health policy at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, told the Philadelphia Inquirer.

The institute's panel urged hospitals to adopt electronic prescribing systems and urged patients to pay more attention to their medication instructions.

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