

Complaint-prone doctors can be identified before complaints occur

11 April 2013

The three-year study, the largest of its kind ever conducted in Australia, found about 3% of Australia's medical workforce accounts for nearly half of all complaints. Researchers also identified several risk factors, which could be used to help identify which doctors were at high risk of receiving further complaints in the near future.

The researchers worked closely with Health [Complaints](#) Commissioners in seven states and territories and collected information on nearly 19,000 complaints against 11,000 doctors over a decade.

The study indicates there is a need to identify the high-risk group earlier in order to target interventions to improve quality of care.

Dr Marie Bismark from the Melbourne School of Population and [Global Health](#) and lead author of the study, said "by identifying high-risk doctors early, there was an opportunity to address problem behaviours and unsafe practice conditions."

"Early identification and intervention should lead to improved quality of care for patients," she said.

"Findings from this study have implications for complaints agencies, indemnity insurers, medical Boards, and professional Colleges."

The strongest predictor of [doctors'](#) risk of future complaints was the number of complaints they had previously received, although specialty and males were also [risk factors](#).

Professor David Studdert, leader of the research group at the University of Melbourne, said this world-first study could help improve the quality and safety of health care. "Finding a way to predict, early on, which clinicians are going to experience lots of medico-legal problems in the future is a kind of holy grail in our field." he said.

"These findings are exciting because they open the way for agencies like [health](#) complaints commissions and medical boards to play more of a prevention role, rather than just waiting to pick up the pieces after things go wrong."

Provided by University of Melbourne

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