

## **Prescription errors common in outpatient setting**

Most health care consumers think they can avoid the risk of going to a hospital if they are treated in outpatient clinics. However, according to the results of a new research study, that's a wrong assumption.

A paper presented during the 23rd annual meeting of the Society of General Internal Medicine revealed that nearly one-fourth of all new prescriptions written at the outpatient clinics studied had errors, some of which could seriously harm the patient.

For a four-week period, the research team, headed by Dr. Tejal Gandhi of Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, collected and reviewed copies of prescriptions from four ambulatory medical clinics.

Of the 384 prescriptions analyzed, 64 had errors, some of them which could cause what is called "adverse drug events" to patients.

"Medication errors are common and preventable in the hospital setting and can lead to adverse drug events (ADEs)," Dr. Gandhi noted, adding that "Potential adverse drug events were errors that had the potential to cause injury to the patient. For example, ordering a beta-blocker at twice the required dose or ordering amoxicillin (a type of penicillin) for a patient with a history of penicillin allergy."

The error rate for new prescriptions was 24% yet even as seemingly simple a job as refilling prescriptions was riddled with errors. One in ten refills were incorrect.

**SOURCE:** "Medication errors and potential adverse drug events among outpatients." Special Symposium: Advances in Assessing and Improving Quality of Care, 23rd annual meeting of the Society of General Internal Medicine, May 6, 2000.