

# Drugs and Medical Errors Killing 1 of Every 5 Australians

*You medical people will have more lives to answer for in the other world than even we generals.* - **Napoleon Bonaparte**

In a recent emailed response to the British Medical Journal (BMJ), Ron Law, Executive Director of the NNFA, in New Zealand and member of the New Zealand Ministry of Health Working Group advising on medical error, offered some enlightening information on deaths caused by drugs and medical errors.

He notes the prevalence of deaths from medical errors and also from properly researched and prescribed medications in Australia and New Zealand, which serves as a reminder to us that the US is not alone in having this problem.

He cites the following statistics and facts:

- Official Australian government reports reveal that preventable medical error in hospitals is responsible for 11% of all deaths in Australia. (1, 2), which is about 1 of every 9 deaths.
- If deaths from properly researched, properly registered, properly prescribed and properly used drugs were added along with preventable deaths due to private practice it comes to a staggering 19%, which is **almost 1 of every 5 deaths**.
- New Zealand figures are very similar. According to Mr. Law:

Put another way, **the equivalent of New Zealand's second largest city (Christchurch) has been killed** by preventable medical error and deaths from properly researched, properly registered, properly prescribed and properly used drugs in Australasia in the past decade and its biggest city Auckland either killed or permanently maimed.

Put another way, more than 5 million people have been killed by Western medical practice in the past decade (Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, and NZ) and **20 million killed or permanently maimed**. Sounds like a war zone, doesn't it?

Put another way, the economic impact of deaths due to preventable medical error and deaths from properly researched, properly registered, properly prescribed and properly used drugs is approximately \$1 trillion over the past decade.

He notes that only 0.3% of these deaths are properly coded and classified in official statistics as being attributed to these causes.

**British Medical Journal November 11, 2000; 321: 1178A**

