

Chicago Tribune reveals frightening fact: nursing mistakes kill, injure thousands

An article in the *Chicago Tribune* by Michael J. Berens has revealed that "Since 1995, at least 1,720 hospital patients have been accidentally killed and 9,584 others injured from the actions or inaction of registered nurses across the country, who have seen their daily routine radically altered by cuts in staff and other belt-tightening in U.S. hospitals."

Although, for decades, nurses have been considered the primary care givers in most hospitals (often inspiring more confidence than the medical doctors), monetary considerations have changed things.

"The majority of hospitals in Chicago and nationally are quietly eliminating or supplanting the role of their best-trained, highest-paid nurses, creating a harried work environment that often compromises patient welfare," the *Tribune* reported.

To reach its conclusions, the newspaper created a massive database of some three million state and federal computer records which reveal the role registered nurses play in medical errors.

"Because of incomplete reporting in the medical field, these numbers only hint at the full scope of the problem," the investigative journalist noted.

The newspaper put a human face on the report by relating actual cases, such as that of a 2-year-old who received a deadly overdose of sedatives. His nurse was a new graduate who was assigned to perform a delicate medical procedure without training or assistance.

In another case -- this one in Denver -- a 78-year-old woman died after her overworked nurse inadvertently administered a fatal dose of drugs via an intravenous line.

The American Hospital Association (AHA) has been voicing concerns about the situation for years. In 1996, according to the *Tribune* article, AHA President Dick Davidson warned, "Patients suffered, literally, because medications and vital, comforting services were delayed, confused or forgotten."

The *Tribune* found that, since 1995:

*** At least 418 patients have been killed and 1,356 others injured by registered nurses operating infusion pumps, which regulate medicine flow.

*** At least 216 patient deaths and 429 injuries have occurred in hospitals where registered nurses failed to hear alarms built into lifesaving equipment, such as respirators and blood-oxygen monitors.

*** At least 119 patients have been killed and 564 others injured by unlicensed, unregulated nurse's aides, who earn an average of \$9.00 an hour but are often used to dispense medicine and perform other medical duties.

SOURCE: ["Nursing mistakes kill, injure thousands."](#) Michael J. Berens, *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 10, 2000.