



Americans' Experiences with Medical Errors and Views on Patient Safety

FACT SHEETS RELEASED SEPTEMBER 28, 2017

- ✓ **Major survey to measure Americans' experiences with medical errors conducted nearly 20 years after the Institute of Medicine's landmark study, *To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System*.**
- ✓ **The data reveal that while the majority of Americans are regularly seeking medical care and are having positive experiences with the health care system, errors in medical care do happen. And when these errors happen, they often have lasting effects for the patient's health and well-being.**
- ✓ **The survey results suggest that Americans support a coordinated effort between many health related stakeholders to improve patient safety in the United States.**
- ✓ **Key findings from the survey conducted May 12-June 26, 2017 include:**
 - Twenty-one percent of Americans say they have personally experienced a medical error and 31 percent have been personally involved with the care of someone who has experienced an error.
 - The most commonly reported type of error are those related to diagnoses. Among those who have experience with a medical error, 59 percent say that the patient had a medical problem that was not diagnosed, was diagnosed incorrectly, or a diagnosis was delayed.
 - Medical errors are understood as a result of multiple systemic errors. Of a list of 23 potential causes of the error, those with medical error experience, on average, identify 7 factors that contributed to the error.
 - Nearly half of patients who say they experienced an error brought it to the attention of medical personnel. Patients report being informed of the error by a provider or other facility staff 32 percent of the time.
 - Most Americans say patient safety overall has stayed the same or has improved over the last five years, and they place the responsibility for ensuring patient safety on health care providers, hospital administration, and patients and family members.
- ✓ **Conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago with funding from the IHI/NPSF Lucian Leape Institute and its inaugural funder, Medtronic. A full report is available at <http://www.ihl.org/about/news/Pages/New-Survey-Looks-at-Patient-Experiences-With-Medical-Error.aspx>.**



How many Americans report experiencing medical errors?

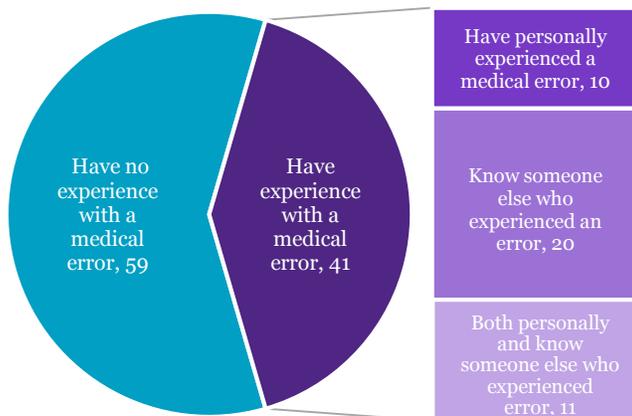
FINDINGS FROM A SPRING 2017 SURVEY OF ADULTS AGE 18 AND OLDER

✓ **Four in 10 adults have experience with medical errors, either personally or in the care of someone close to them.**

- Twenty-one percent of Americans say they have experienced a medical error in their own care at some point in their lives.
- Thirty-one percent of Americans report in the survey that a medical error was made in the care of someone else whose care they were closely involved with.
- This figure is largely unchanged from a similar [1997 survey](#) when 42 percent had experience with an error.

6 in 10 Americans have not encountered a medical error, while 4 in 10 have experienced a medical error personally, in someone else's care, or both.

% of adults who ...



Questions: Have you ever personally been involved in a situation where a medical error was made in your own medical care, or has that not happened?

Have you ever personally been involved in a situation where a medical error was made in the care of someone close to you where you were very familiar with the care they were receiving, or has that not happened?

This survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago with funding from the IHI/NPSF Lucian Leape Institute and its inaugural funder, Medtronic. Interviews were conducted using AmeriSpeak® with a nationally representative sample of 2,536 adults age 18 and over online and using landlines and cell phones from May 12-June 26, 2017. Results have a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.2 percentage points. A full report and topline are available at <http://www.ihl.org/about/news/Pages/New-Survey-Looks-at-Patient-Experiences-With-Medical-Error.aspx>.

✓ **The language surrounding patient safety issues isn't familiar to many Americans.**

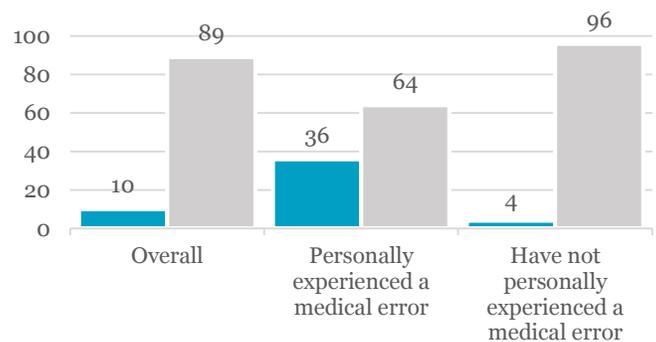
- A quarter of Americans have heard of the term "medical error" but aren't sure what it means. Another 22 percent are not familiar with the term at all.
- Fifty-three percent of all adults say they have both heard of medical errors and know what they are.

✓ **Americans view medical errors and medical harm as different concepts.**

- This survey was designed to investigate how adults view the relationship between harm and error.
- Only 1 in 10 say they have been harmed physically or emotionally while receiving medical care, suggesting that Americans see medical errors and harm differently.
- There is a clear connection between medical errors and harm—36 percent of those who personally experienced an error also say they've been harmed, compared with 4 percent of those without error experience.

While just 10 percent of adults say they've been harmed while seeking care, many of those who have experienced a medical error have also been harmed.

% of adults who ...



- Have been harmed while receiving medical care
- Have not been harmed while receiving medical care

Question: Have you ever been harmed, either physically or emotionally, when you received medical care or has that not happened?



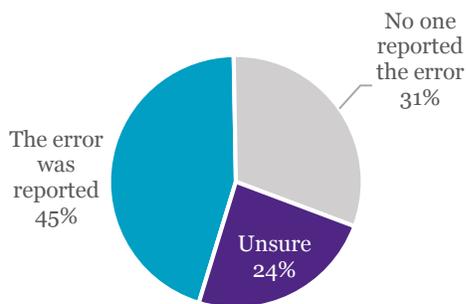
How patients, health care professionals, and organizations respond to perceived errors.

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✓ **Nearly half of patients who experienced an error brought it to the attention of medical personnel or other health care facility staff.**

- In 32 percent of cases where an error was experienced, the person with error experience says they were informed of the mistake by a health care provider or someone else at the facility where the error happened.
- Among those who personally experienced a medical error, 31 percent reported it themselves and 10 percent had someone report it on their behalf.
- Among those who were involved in the care of someone who experienced a medical error, 12 percent reported it on the patient's behalf, 20 percent say the patient reported it themselves, and 17 percent say someone else reported the error.

Nearly half of survey respondents who say they experienced a medical error say that it was reported to medical personnel, other health care facility staff, or to someone else.



Question: Did [you/you or the person close to you] report the medical error, did someone else report it on [your/their] behalf, or did no one report it?

✓ **The biggest motivation for reporting a medical error comes from trying to prevent it from happening to others.**

- Seventy-six percent of those who reported the error say they did so to prevent the same error from happening again.
- Fifty-three percent say a major reason for doing so was to help cope with or treat problems caused by the error.

✓ **People often don't report errors because they don't think it will make a difference.**

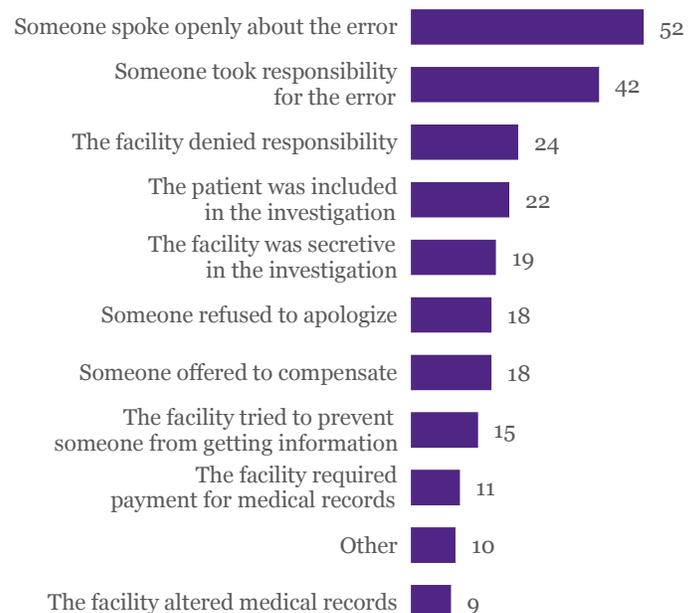
- Fifty-six percent of those who did not report the error say they didn't think it would do any good.
- Four in 10 say they didn't know how to report the error.
- Twenty-four percent say the error was an honest mistake and no harm was intended so they didn't report it.

✓ **When cases of medical errors are reported by the patient or relayed to the patient, health care providers and facilities accept responsibility about half the time.**

- Among those who say the error was reported, 52 percent say the health care provider or staff member spoke openly and directly about the error.
- Forty-two percent say someone apologized and took responsibility for the error and 24 percent say the facility denied responsibility.

In half of the reported cases, someone spoke openly and directly about the medical error.

% whose error was reported who say each happened...



Question: How did the facility or health care provider respond to the error?

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What types of medical errors do Americans most often report and where do they occur?

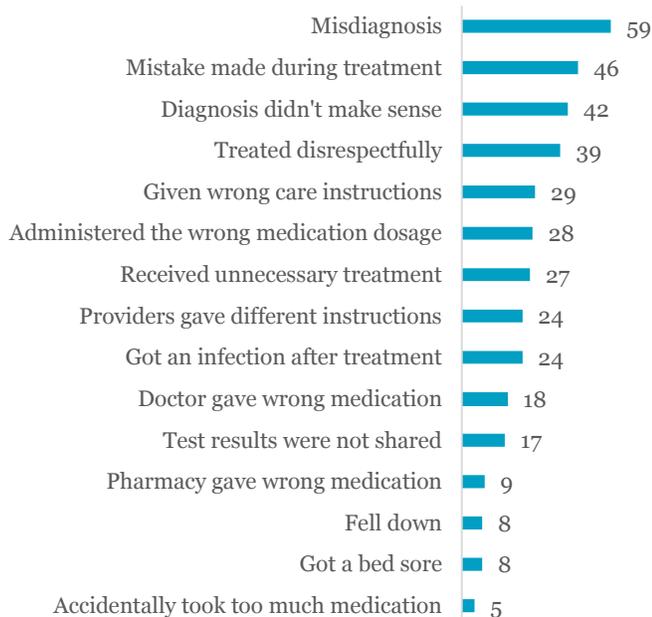
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✓ Diagnostic errors are the most commonly reported type of error.

- Of a list of 15 types of medical errors, the most common are diagnostic errors. Fifty-nine percent of those with medical error experience say the medical problem was not diagnosed, was diagnosed incorrectly, or a diagnosis was delayed.
- Forty-six percent say a mistake was made during a test, surgery, or treatment.
- Many identified lack of respect and other provider-patient communication issues to be errors as well.

Six in 10 adults with medical error experience say a medical problem was misdiagnosed and 4 in 10 say they weren't treated with respect.

% with error experience who say each happened...



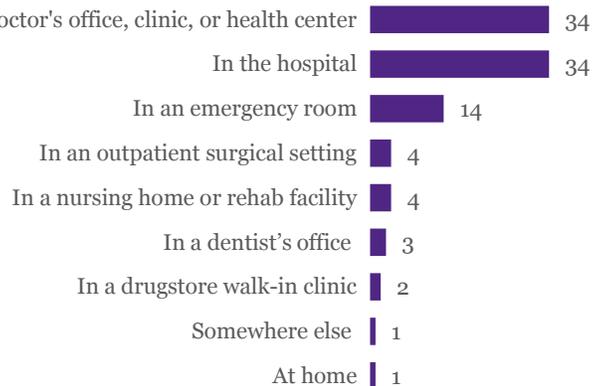
Questions: Again, thinking about the most recent time a medical error was made in [your care/the care of someone close to you], for each of the following, please indicate whether or not it is the sort of medical error that occurred.

✓ Americans are most likely to say they experienced an error in an outpatient setting.

- Thirty-four percent occurred in a doctor's office, clinic, or health center and another 14 percent occurred in an emergency room.
- Thirty-four percent of the medical errors reported occurred in a hospital, but not in an emergency room.

More than half of adults with medical error experience say the error occurred in an outpatient setting.

% with error experience who say the error took place in each setting...



Question: In this most recent time when a medical error was made in [your care/the care of someone close to you], where did this error take place?

✓ In most cases, the medical error had a significant impact on the patient's life.

- Seventy-three percent say the error had a long-term or permanent impact on the patient's physical health, emotional health, financial well-being, or their family relationships.
- Impacts on a person's physical health were the most likely outcome with 57 percent saying the error had a long-term or permanent effect on the patient's physical health.
- Just 7 percent say the error had no impact at all.

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What factors lead to medical errors?

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✓ **Those with medical error experience understand errors as a result of multiple systemic problems.**

- Adults with medical error experience were asked what factors they believe could have led to the error from a list of 23 items.
- Those with medical error experience identify an average of 7 factors that contributed to the error.
- Just 5 percent identify a single contributing factor that led to the error.

✓ **Perceived failures in institutional supports for providers are some of the more commonly cited factors.**

- Sixty-nine percent of adults with medical error experience believe that having a health care provider that lacked attention to detail contributed to the error.
- Fifty-eight percent believe that having a poorly trained provider contributed to the error.
- Half say the medical error was a result of overworked, tired, and stressed health care providers.

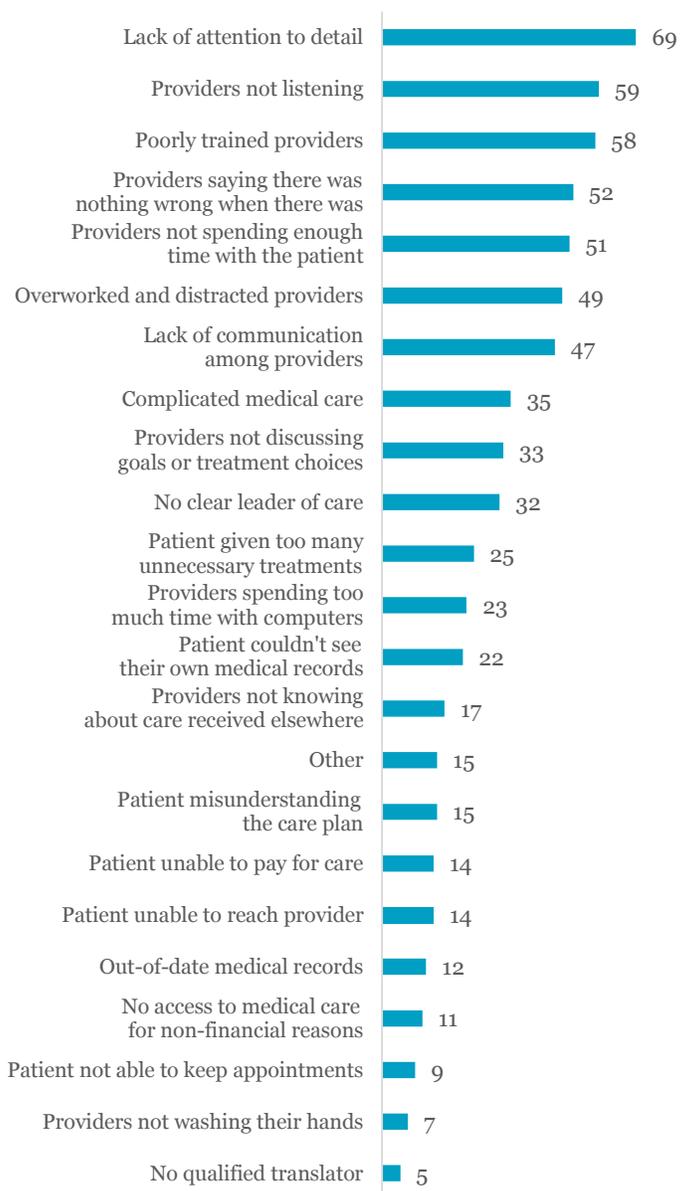
✓ **Factors related to poor provider/patient communication are also commonly cited.**

- Fifty-nine percent of adults with medical error experience say having a health care provider that didn't listen to the patient may have led to the error.
- One-third say providers not discussing goals or treatment options with the patient could have been a factor.
- Another third say too many health care providers being involved in the care with no clear leader may have contributed to the problem.

✓ **Half attribute the error to misdiagnosis and few see medication-related or other factors as contributing to the medical error.**

- Fifty-two percent of adults with medical error experience say a health care provider said nothing was wrong when there really was an issue.
- Twenty-five percent believe that the patient being given too many unnecessary tests or drugs was a contributing factor.
- Fewer than 1 in 5 attribute the error to other causes such as not being able to pay for necessary medical care, not having access to medical care for non-financial reasons, or not being able to keep follow-up appointments.

People with medical error experience identified an average of seven factors that contributed to the error, with the most common being lack of attention to detail. % with error experience citing each factor...



Question: What factors do you think could have led to the error?

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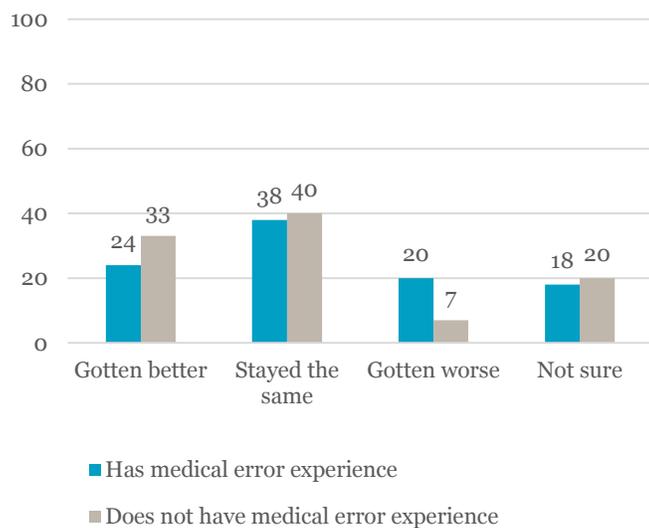
What do Americans think about patient safety?

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✓ **Most Americans say patient safety has stayed the same or gotten better over the past five years.**

- Thirty-nine percent of Americans say patient safety has stayed the same over the last five years, 29 percent say it has gotten better, and 12 percent say it has gotten worse. Nineteen percent are unsure.
- Adults who have experience with a medical error are more likely than adults without medical error experience to say patient safety has gotten worse.

Adults with medical error experience are less positive about the state of patient safety in the US.



Question: Over the past 5 years, do you think that patient safety has...?

✓ **Few think they will experience a medical error when receiving care.**

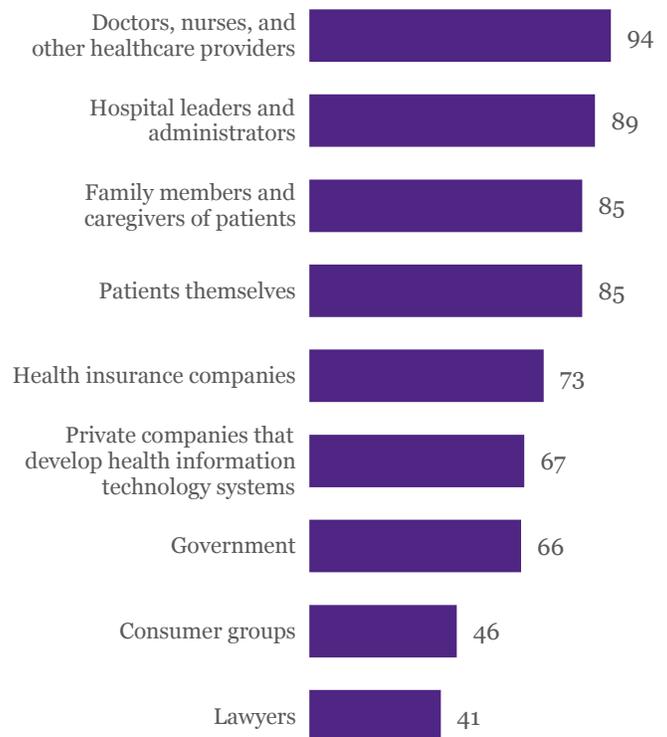
- Sixty-four percent believe it's not too likely or not at all likely that an error will occur, while 26 percent say it's moderately likely and 9 percent say it's extremely or very likely.
- Those without medical error experience are more likely to say they are not at risk (75 percent vs. 48 percent).

✓ **Americans believe the responsibility for ensuring patient safety lies with many health related stakeholders.**

- More than 9 in 10 Americans say doctors, nurses, and other health care providers have a responsibility for ensuring patient safety.
- Eighty-nine percent say the responsibility is with hospital leaders and administrators, and 85 percent say patients themselves as well as family members and caregivers of patients are responsible.

Most place responsibility for patient safety on a range of stakeholders.

% who say each has a responsibility for ensuring patient safety...



Question: Which of the following has a responsibility for ensuring a patient's safety?

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