

More docs opt for full disclosure

By **JESSICA FARGEN**

Hospitals and doctors are not required by law to tell patients when medical mistakes are made, but safety advocates say more and more hospitals are tackling the unpopular shroud of secrecy.

“What I see emerging is the people that don’t disclose are not going to be the norm,” said Linda Kenney, president of Medically Induced Trauma Support Services, a Boston-area support group for those injured by medical errors and mistakes. “There’s an acceptance throughout the country that this is here and it’s here to stay. We are no longer going to sweep things under the rug and hope nobody mentions it.”

All Harvard hospitals, including Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, have

adopted the tenets of “When Things Go Wrong,” a policy paper written by Harvard’s Dr. Lucian Leape that outlines how and why patients should be told of errors quickly and forthrightly.

Beth Israel and one of its former surgeons, Dr. Loren J. Borud, are being sued by Michael K. Hicks, 44, of Quincy, who claims he was left in the dark about a June 27 surgery that’s left him with post-operative complications.

Jim Conway, senior vice president at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, a national patient safety think tank in Cambridge, said Leape’s document, which calls for immediate and full disclosure of errors, has set a national standard.

“You tell the patient what’s happening, why it’s happening and what’s being done to prevent it from happening again,” he said. “If the harm was due to an error, you apologize. The industry is also learning that the only risk greater than disclosure is the risk to know something and not disclose it.”

Kenney, who suffered complications after an adverse event at a Boston hospital, said work is being done to better train hospital staff to fully and openly address errors with patients and their colleagues.

“We need to make it OK for anybody at any level to stop this and say, ‘It’s not safe,’” she said.

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