ECRI Institute

Diagnostic Errors: Why Do They Matter, and What Can You Do?

Why They Need Attention Now

Diagnostic errors are difficult to measure. But what is known points to a significant problem.

Deaths

Diagnostic errors that may have contributed to death have been found in **10%** of autopsies

Source: Shojania et al.

This extrapolates to **40,000 to 80,000** deaths annually

Source: Leape et al. "Counting Deaths."

Adverse Events

7% to 17% of adverse events in hospitals result from diagnostic errors, per record reviews

Sources: Leape et al. "The Nature of Adverse Events"; Thomas et al.

Liability

Most Common Allegation

29% of claims

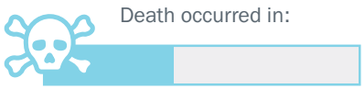
Most Costly Allegation

35% of payments

$390,000 mean payout

Most Deadly Allegation

Death occurred in:



41% of diagnostic error claims

vs.

24% of other claims

Source: Saber Tehrani et al.

Frequency

At least **1 in 20** adults experiences a diagnostic error annually, based on outpatient studies

Source: Singh et al.

12% of adults said they or someone close to them had experienced a misdiagnosis in the past 5 years, according to a phone survey

Source: Betsy Lehman Center.

> **"Most people will experience at least one diagnostic error in their lifetime, sometimes with devastating consequences."**
>
> — Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on improving diagnosis

Source: NAS.

What You Can Do

The IOM report offers recommendations across 8 broad goals for a variety of stakeholders (NAS).

- Teamwork among healthcare professionals, patients, and families
- Education and training regarding the diagnostic process
- Identification of errors and near misses and efforts to learn from and reduce them
- Supportive health information technology systems
- Learning-focused reporting and medical liability systems
- A supportive culture and work system
- Supportive payment and care delivery environments
- Research funding

Learn how to reduce diagnostic errors.
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Sources

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About ECRI Institute

ECRI Institute, a nonprofit organization, is an independent, trusted authority on the medical practices and products that provide the safest, most cost-effective care. For more than half a century, ECRI Institute has built its reputation on rigorous evidence-based research, with an unwavering dedication to strict conflict-of-interest policies and transparent reporting of its findings. ECRI Institute is designated an Evidence-based Practice Center by the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. ECRI Institute PSO is listed as a federally certified Patient Safety Organization by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Visit ecri.org and follow @ECRI_Institute.

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