Doctors Are The 3rd Leading Cause of Death in the US, Causing 225,000 Deaths Every Year

In July of 2000 there was a great article in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), one of the best articles ever written in the published literature documenting the tragedy of the traditional medical paradigm.

This information was published in JAMA which is the most widely circulated medical periodical in the world.

The author of the article is Dr. Barbara Starfield of the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health and she describes how the US health care system may contribute to medical mistakes and poor health.

DEATHS PER YEAR:

12,000 - unnecessary surgery (8)
7,000 - medication errors in hospitals (9)
20,000 - other errors in hospitals (10)
80,000 - infections in hospitals (10)
106,000 - non-error, negative effects of drugs

This is a total of 225,000 deaths per year from a physician's activity, manner, or therapy.

Dr. Starfield reminds us to keep the following in mind when interpreting these numbers:

- 1st, most of the data are derived from studies in hospitalized patients.
- 2nd, these estimates are for deaths only and do not include negative effects that are associated with disability or discomfort.
- 3rd, the estimates of death due to error are lower than those in the IOM report.1

If the higher estimates are used, the deaths would range from 230,000 to 284,000. In any case, 225,000 deaths per year constitutes the 3rd leading cause of death in the United States, after deaths from heart disease and cancer. Even if these figures are an overestimate, there is a
wide margin between these numbers of deaths and the next leading cause of death (cerebrovascular disease).

Another analysis concluded that between 4% and 18% of patients experience negative effects in outpatient settings, with:

- 116 million extra physician visits
- 77 million extra prescriptions
- 17 million emergency department visits
- 8 million hospitalizations
- 3 million long-term admissions
- 199,000 additional deaths
- $77 billion in extra costs

The high cost of the health care system seems to be tolerated under the assumption that better health results from more expensive care.

However, evidence from a few studies indicates that as many as 20% to 30% of patients receive inappropriate care.

According to one study(2), an estimated 44,000 to 98,000 among them die each year as a result of medical errors.

This situation might be tolerated if it resulted in better health, but does it? Of 13 countries in a recent comparison,(3,4) the U. S. ranks an average of 12th (one up from the bottom) for 16 available health indicators. More specifically, the ranking of the United States on several indicators was:

- 13th (last) for low-birth-weight percentages
- 13th for neonatal mortality and infant mortality overall (14)
- 11th for postneonatal mortality
- 13th for years of potential life lost (excluding external causes)
- 11th for life expectancy at 1 year for females, 12th for males
- 10th for life expectancy at 15 years for females, 12th for males
- 10th for life expectancy at 40 years for females, 9th for males
- 7th for life expectancy at 65 years for females, 7th for males
- 3rd for life expectancy at 80 years for females, 3rd for males
- 10th for age-adjusted mortality
The poor performance of the US was recently confirmed by a World Health Organization study, which used different data and ranked the U. S. as 15th among 25 industrialized countries.

Lack of technology is certainly not a contributing factor to the United States’s low ranking.

Among 29 countries, the United States is 2nd only to Japan in the availability of computed tomography (CT) scanners and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) units per million population. (17)

Japan, however, ranks highest on health whereas the United States ranks among the lowest.


If this information is surprising to you, you can find out more about the medical establishment in the United States and how public relations firms shape and manipulate the public's beliefs on the "Why you believe what you believe" page.

References


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