

Drug Mistakes Kill 100,000 Hospital Patients Each Year.

The American medical profession has been reluctant to admit it, but the truth has finally been revealed. A report in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* confirmed that hospitals can be extremely dangerous to one's health. In fact, adverse drug reactions (ADRs) in U.S. hospitals may be responsible for more than 100,000 deaths nationwide each year, making it one of the leading causes of death in the United States. More than two million patients experienced reactions which, while not fatal, were deemed serious.

The study was conducted by Bruce H. Pomeranz, M.D., Ph.D., and colleagues from the University of Toronto. The authors estimated that 2,216,000 hospital patients experienced a serious ADR and 106,000 deaths were caused by ADRs in the United States. This could account for 4.6% of all causes of recorded death in 1994, making these reactions between the fourth and sixth leading cause of death. The authors defined a "serious ADR" as one requiring hospitalization prolonging hospitalization, or one that is permanently disabling or results in death.

The researchers voiced surprise that the incidence of ADR was so high, considering the much touted advanced in "modern medicine." They wrote: "This result seems surprising since great changes have occurred over the last four decades in U.S. hospitals that should have affected the incidence of ADRs. Perhaps, while length of hospital stays are decreasing, the number of drugs per day may be rising to compensate."

The authors determined that ADRs are one of the leading causes of death by using the highest and lowest possible estimates. Using the higher estimate placed ADRs as the fourth leading cause of death, behind heart disease (743,460 deaths), cancer (529,904 deaths) and stroke (150,108 deaths).

Using the lower estimate placed ADRs as the sixth leading cause of death behind those previously mentioned, as well as pulmonary disease (101,077 deaths) and accidents (90,523 deaths). ADRs would then rank ahead of pneumonia and diabetes.

The authors concluded: "While our results must be viewed with some circumspection because of the heterogeneity among the studies and small biases in the sample, these data suggest that ADRs represent an important clinical issue."