



Pittsburgh Regional Healthcare Initiative

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First quarter 2004 data show increased reporting

Medication error reporting improves

The only “good” medication error is one that gets reported. People can only learn and solve problems when errors are reported, not buried. Therefore, the regional trend in increased reporting is encouraging. Unmasking problems individually also helps unmask the scope of the entire problem. In other words, the first step toward eliminating medication errors is being able to see them all.

To the outside observer, an increasing number of reports may look like an increasing number of errors. But there’s more to the story.

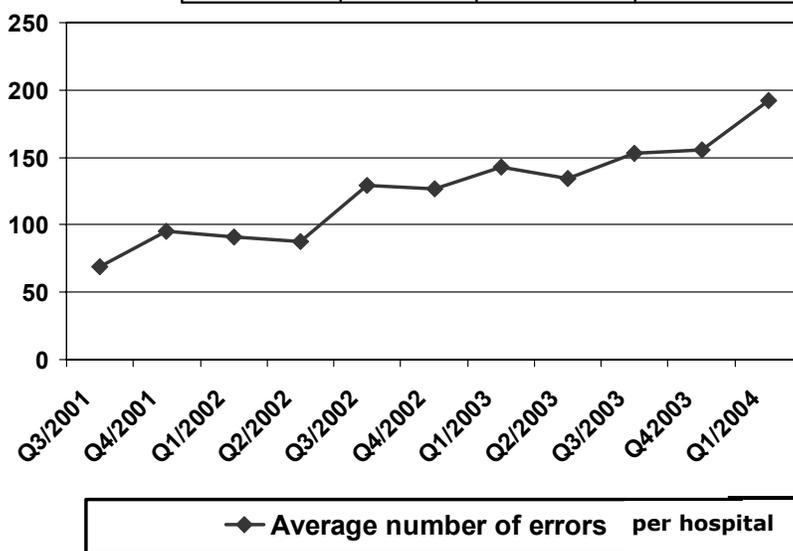
Since only a tiny fraction of medication errors are ever reported, the true scope of the problem remains unknown. One of the best estimates comes from Lucian Leape. Based on Dr. Leape’s observational studies*, and then extrapolated to a region the size of Pittsburgh, the best guess is that 3 million medication errors occur each year in this region. These errors range from legibility errors to mistakes causing actual patient harm.

“I hope that the increase in reported errors means that hospital workers are being truly encouraged to record them,” said PRHI CEO Paul O’Neill. “But until we are recording 3 million medication errors per year in Pittsburgh, we aren’t telling ourselves the truth about the extent of this problem. If we knew that, we would not tolerate it.”

As part of their commitment to eradicating medication errors, several area hospitals have begun real-time problem solving, finding and fixing the root causes of individual medication errors. In doing so, many systemic problems are also being revealed and solved. ☺

*Presentation by Lucian Leape, Philadelphia, April 29 2004, citing forthcoming study

Quarter/Year	# of Errors Rptd	# of Hosps Particip.	Average # of Errors Rptd per Hospital
Q3/2001	692	10	69
Q4/2001	1427	15	95
Q1/2002	2756	30	91
Q2/2002	2579	29	88
Q3/2002	3509	27	129
Q4/2002	3557	28	127
Q1/2003	4277	30	143
Q2/2003	4012	30	134
Q3/2003	5059	33	153
Q4/2003	4224	27	156
Q1/2004	4608	24	192



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