

## Fixing a Hole

Bob was born with four holes in his heart. One was larger than his aorta. Experts deemed it the most severe and complicated case they had ever seen. Though they expected that Bob would die, they never told his parents, Shannon and Jeff. In the months following his birth, Bob deteriorated before their eyes. He started turning blue when feeding, and soon refused to eat at all -- sucking was too much work for his weakened heart. Soon afterward, he was admitted to the hospital.

Nurses kept telling Shannon that she didn't have to be there all the time. They encouraged her to go home and rest. But she refused, scarcely leaving her baby's side. A week later, she looked up to see a nurse enter the room with a syringe full of medicine to inject into Bob's IV.

Shannon had noticed that one of his drugs had a cloudy appearance, and one was clear. One had a high dose, and one a low dose. Startled by what she saw in the syringe, she blurted out, "That's three times what he usually gets!"

The nurse looked at her quizzically and then left the room. She returned a moment later, visibly shaken. She had accidentally reversed the doses of the two drugs and had nearly injected a massive overdose of a heart-slowing drug into the infant's IV. It would have killed him instantly. Bob's life was saved only because Shannon wasn't in the bathroom or getting a cup of coffee when the nurse showed up.

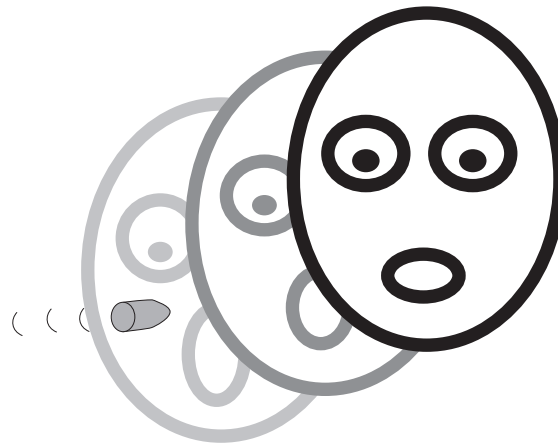
Shortly after that, Bob had open heart surgery and survived the trauma.

Bob's care is a microcosm of health care in America: incredible miracles in the dramatic too frequently undermined by catastrophic failures in the basics. In Bob's case -- thanks to the intervention of his mother -- the miracles won out: six years after death-defying surgery, Bob is an intelligent, active, cheerful human being.

Adapted from *Killer Cure*  
by Elizabeth L. Bewley

# Medical Mishaps

## Dodge the Bullet



## Avoid Deadly Hazards Of Medical Treatment

One study concluded that "medical errors in U.S. hospitals contributed to almost 600,000 patient deaths over the past three years."

Paul Davies, "Fatal Medical Errors Said to be More Widespread," *WSJ*, 27 Jul 2004.

In American hospitals alone, healthcare-associated infections account for an estimated 1.7 million infections and 99,000 associated deaths each year.

"Estimates of Healthcare-Associated Infections," CDC, downloaded 15 Jun 2009.

One study concluded that "106,000 hospitalized patients died as a result of adverse drug reactions." Another concluded that adverse drug events "accounted for ... 199,000 additional deaths" among non-hospitalized patients (NHP).

Jason Lazarou, et. al., *JAMA*, 18 Apr 1998;  
Saul Weingart, et. al., *BMJ*, 18 Mar 2000.

John Heit at the Mayo Clinic estimates that blood clots that arise because of surgery or other hospital care kill about 200,000 people each year.

John Heit, "Venous Thromboembolism Prophylaxis for the Medical Patient," and "The Epidemiology of Venous Thromboembolism," Mayo Clinic, 2006.

## Avoid Hazards of Medical Treatment

### Being treated?

1. Make sure your doctor has a list of all the medicines you are taking.
2. Make sure your doctor has a complete list of symptoms and an accurate medical history.
3. Be aware that failure to respond to a treatment can sometimes mean that the diagnosis is wrong. It can also mean that the treatment chosen is not effective for you and you need another treatment.

### Admitted to a hospital?

1. Make sure you ask to be evaluated for the risk of blood clots; if you are at risk, ask your doctor how they will be prevented.
2. Ask everyone who enters your room -- doctors, nurses, and family members -- to wash their hands.
3. Verify that the drugs and doses administered to you correspond to what is prescribed.
4. If you believe something is going wrong with your treatment, speak up.

### Getting a prescription?

1. Be clear about what you are taking, how much, when, and possible interactions with food and other drugs.
2. Understand what the drug is for and when you should see results. Look out for side effects or lack of results and report them to your doctor.

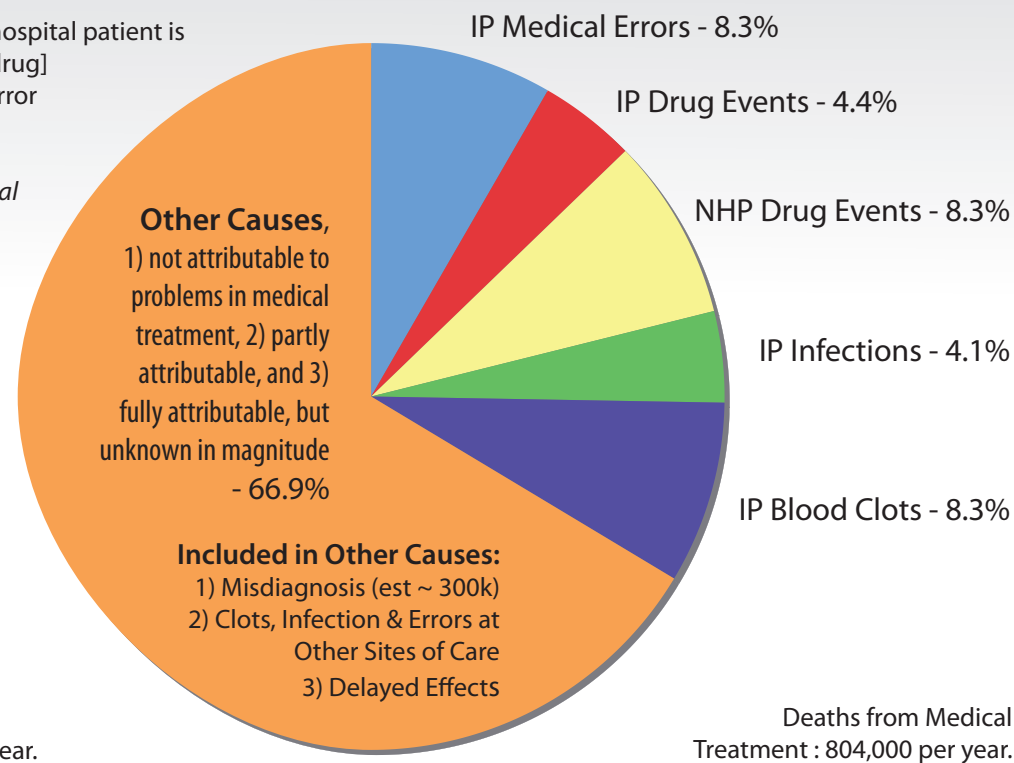
### Online Sources of Tips to Prevent Problems

1. Medical Errors - <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/20tips.pdf>
2. Adverse Drug Events - <http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/SpeakUp/>
3. Blood Clots - <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/bloodclots.htm>
4. Infections - [http://www.partnershipforhealthcare.org/patients\\_and\\_caregivers/preventing\\_infection/](http://www.partnershipforhealthcare.org/patients_and_caregivers/preventing_infection/)

## Causes of Death Due To Problems With Medical Treatment In The US

"On average, a hospital patient is subject to one [drug] administration error per day."

*Preventing Medical Errors*, Institute of Medicine, 2006.



### Watch the Video

Go to [www.killercure.net](http://www.killercure.net), click on "Videos," and select "Death by Health Care."

### Read More

See *Killer Cure* by Elizabeth L. Bewley for more discussion, resources, and references.

Cause	Deaths
Inpatient Medical Error	200,000
Inpatient Drug Events	106,000
NHP Drug Events	199,000
Inpatient Infections	99,000
Inpatient Blood Clots	200,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>804,000</b>