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Americans Are Concerned About Hospital-Based Medical and Surgical Errors

Hospital-based medication, surgical and diagnostic errors are of concern to most Americans, according to the results of a new Harris Interactive poll of 2,847 U.S. adults conducted online between July 8 and 12, 2004 for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

Level of Concern about Hospital-Based Errors

Three in five Americans (63%) are "extremely concerned" (39%) or "very concerned" (24%) about hospital-based medication errors, such as receiving the wrong medication or the wrong dose, and 55% are concerned about hospital-based surgical errors that might include incorrect amputations or mistaken patient identities – 39% are "extremely concerned" and 16% are "very concerned."

Public Perception of Hospitals' Ability to Prevent Errors

The public is only moderately confident about the ability of U.S. hospitals to prevent these types of errors.

- While one in three adults (33%) believe hospitals do an "excellent" or "very good" job preventing medication errors, nearly equal proportions (28%) believe hospitals do a "fair" or "poor" job.
- Likewise, one in three adults (30%) believe that hospitals do an "excellent" or "very good" job preventing diagnostic errors, but an equally large proportion believes they do a "fair" or "poor" job (29%)
- The public is somewhat more confident about hospitals' abilities when it comes to preventing surgical errors; 42% believe they do an "excellent" or "very good" job.

Will New Hospital Procedures Help Prevent Errors?

New procedures instituted in July to prevent surgical errors include double-checking patients' identities and using standardized procedures for marking patients' bodies in preparation for surgery. Most Americans think these new procedures will be effective – 15% "extremely effective," 43% "very effective," and 36% "somewhat effective" in preventing future errors.

"These findings suggest that efforts by the Institute of Medicine and others to increase public awareness of patient safety issues are hitting home with the American public. Public concern about medical, surgical and diagnostic errors is high; and many have doubts about the ability of our medical institutions to prevent these types of errors. On the bright side, most adults are also confident that initiatives like the recently enacted hospital standards to help prevent surgical errors will prove to be effective in advancing patient safety," says Katherine Binns, senior vice president of health care at Harris Interactive.

Health Care Poll

TABLE 1

Concerns About Medical Errors

“Based on what you know or have heard, how concerned are you about the following types of medical errors that can take place in a hospital?”

Base: All Adults

	Extremely Concerned	Very Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Not Too Concerned	Not At All Concerned	Not Sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Medication errors (such as receiving the wrong medication or the wrong dose of a medication)	39	24	23	11	3	1
Surgical errors (such as incorrect amputations or mistaken patient identities)	39	16	22	17	5	1
Diagnostic errors	37	26	24	10	2	1

Note: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2

Perceptions Of Hospitals’ Ability To Prevent Errors

“Overall, how good a job do you think hospitals do today in preventing the following types of medical errors?”

Base: All Adults

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Not Sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Medication errors (such as receiving the wrong medication or the wrong dose of a medication)	5	27	34	22	6	6
Surgical errors (such as incorrect amputations or mistaken patient identities)	11	31	33	14	4	6
Diagnostic errors	4	26	35	22	7	6

Note: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Health Care Poll

TABLE 3

Efficacy Of New Preventative Procedures

“New procedures were instituted by hospitals last week to prevent surgical errors. These include double checking patients’ identities and using standardized procedures for marking patients’ bodies for surgery. How effective do you think these types of procedures will be in preventing surgical errors?”

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
Extremely effective	15
Very effective	43
Somewhat effective	36
Not very effective	1
Not at all effective	1
Not sure	4

Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp.

Methodology

This study was conducted online within the United States between July 8 and 12, 2004 among a nationwide cross section of 2,847 adults. Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a sampling error of ± 3.0 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About the Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the award-winning Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/health.



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About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive (www.harrisinteractive.com) is a worldwide market research and consulting firm best known for *The Harris Poll*[®], and for pioneering the Internet method to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, Harris Interactive combines proprietary methodologies and technology with expertise in predictive, custom and strategic research. The Company conducts international research from its U.S. offices and through wholly owned subsidiaries—London-based **HI Europe** (www.hieurope.com), Paris-based **Novatris** and Tokyo-based **Harris Interactive Japan**—as well as through the Harris Interactive Global Network of independent market- and opinion-research firms. EOE M/F/D/V

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