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Contact: Martine Ehrenclou
(310) 458-6047
www.criticalconditions.com

**AUTHOR AND PATIENT SAFETY EXPERT OFFERS TIPS
ON HOW TO PREVENT DEADLY MEDICAL ERRORS DURING A
HOSPITAL STAY**

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Preventable medical errors (never events) in hospitals nationwide are currently of immense concern. Martine Ehrenclou, MA, author of *Critical Conditions: The Essential Hospital Guide To Get Your Loved One Out Alive*, (Lemon Grove Press) offers the following tips on how to prevent deadly medical errors during a hospital stay. Nearly a quarter of a million deaths in hospitals nationwide were found to be preventable (*The Fifth Annual HealthGrades Patient Safety in American Hospitals Study, 2008*).

There must be a family member or good friend to act as a watchdog to oversee hospital care in an effort to prevent medical errors. The hospitalized patient cannot do this for himself. The book shows you how to implement some fairly simple strategies, such as the following:

1. **You need to act as the patient's eyes and ears:** get a notebook. Write down the patient's name, hospital room, the physicians' and primary nurses' names and contact information, the patient's diagnosis and treatment plan.
2. **To prevent medication mistakes:** write down the patient's medications and dosages. List what the medication looks like, the shape and color of any pills, the names on the labels of bottles or IV bags. Create a detailed description, as labels and bottles can look alike. Make sure you recognize the medication when it is administered. If you don't, ask questions. Be assertive. Also make sure the patient's allergies to any medications are in their chart and repeat it to the primary nurse.
3. **To prevent patient name mistakes:** check with each hospital staff member who either comes to pick up the patient for a procedure or who is to administer a treatment, and match the patient's name and correct procedure. Repeat this checklist with each hospital staff person.

4. **To prevent surgery on the wrong body part:** accompany the patient to the operating room and ask to see the surgeon. Ask this doctor to mark on the patient's body the correct site to be operated on, and to specify which surgery is to be performed. If the surgeon is not available, ask to see the anesthesiologist and other staff involved in your loved one's case. Repeat this same checklist with each staff member.
5. **To prevent the spread of hospital-acquired infectious diseases:** MRSA and pneumonia are among the most virulent. Wash your hands. Ask every person who comes in contact with the patient, including the physicians and nurses, to wash their hands or put on a fresh pair of disposable gloves before touching the patient. Place antibacterial gel next to the patient's bed and ask everyone to use it.

Above all, try to be with the patient as much as possible. You don't want your loved one, who might be in pain, calling for a nurse who doesn't come. Patients with involved family members get more attention. For a short period of time, you will help facilitate this. You could save a life.

Martine Ehrenclou, MA, is the author of *Critical Conditions: The Essential Hospital Guide To Get Your Loved One Out Alive*, published by Lemon Grove Press. The book is based on over 150 interviews with physicians, nurses, hospital staff, psychologists, family members and hundreds of hours of research. www.criticalconditions.com