

The New York Times

LETTERS

Making Hospitals Safer for Patients

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To the Editor:

Re "[First, Make No Mistakes](#)," by Jim Hall (Op-Ed, July 29):

Regarding the lack of progress in improving patient safety, we certainly should take a lesson from the National Transportation Safety Board's successes and establish an independent agency charged with identifying and eliminating the causes of medical error, as Jim Hall, former chairman of that board, recommended.

We do not, however, need a new federal agency to do more research into the causes of medical errors. The causes and effective measures for preventing the most serious, recurring medical errors are already known. We need a federal patient safety agency to require compliance with proven safety measures to prevent problems like wrong-site surgeries and hospital-acquired infections.

The Institute of Medicine estimates that up to 98,000 Americans die each year as a result of preventable medical errors — the equivalent of a daily catastrophic jumbo jet crash.

We need to act decisively. Congressional establishment of a federal patient safety agency with authority to monitor existing public and private sources of medical errors information and, when patterns of serious, recurring errors are obvious, to order health care providers' compliance with proven preventive measures would save tens of thousands of lives and billions of dollars.

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Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative
Pittsburgh, July 30, 2009