

Estimates of complications of medical care in the adult US population

ABSTRACT

Complications of medical care impose heavier morbidity than previously considered with some indication that socio-demographic variables modify the risk for injuries.

INTRODUCTION

Background The Harvard Medical Practice Study (HMPS) examined the epidemiology of iatrogenic injuries arising from unintended adverse reactions and complications of medical care, termed "adverse events". The study recruited a random sample of patients discharged from hospitals in New York state in 1984. Adverse events were found to occur in 3.4% of patients undergoing medical management. Of these, 14% died. Apart from raising awareness of the magnitude of the problem [], data from the HMPS has been used to estimate rates for the entire US general population. There is concern that the scope of the HMPS might produce inappropriate population estimates, given that it was limited to a single state and collected data for a single year. For instance, a recent hospital-based study conducted in Utah and Colorado reported an adverse event rate of 2.9% following hospitalization. The authors' extrapolation of this data to the general US population produced estimates that were lower than those derived from HMPS. We present the results of analyses of self-reported complications of medical care using several years of cross-sectional data from a nationwide survey of US adults. We attempted to estimate the population prevalence of medical complications and examine the relationship between the self-reported complications of medical care and selected socio-demographic variables.

CONCLUSION

Conclusions These data suggest that self-reported injuries due to complications of medical care impose heavier morbidity than previously considered with some indication that socio-demographic variables modify the risk for injuries. Further studies are required to better understand these relationships.