

## inyourcorner

# PREVENTABLE MEDICAL ERRORS



BY EDDIE FARAH

FARAH & FARAH P.A.

In an ideal world, the medical profession would police itself and weed out the doctors who make the bulk of medical errors that lead to death or disability. But this is the real world, and in the real world, the medical profession tends to protect its own and cover the behinds of the bad doctors responsible for repeated mistakes.

So it should come as no surprise when a new study shows a 25,000 Medicare patients have died from preventable medical errors. The HealthGrades "Patient Safety in American Hospitals" assessment, released in April, finds that from 2002 to 2004, 1.24 million patient safety incidents or medical errors occurred. Over that same time period, 250,246 deaths were potentially preventable.

Surgical errors, misdiagnoses that lead to a delay in treatment and medication errors are among the problems. And the blame should not fall solely on medical personnel — the system is at fault, too. Bone-tired doctors and nurses, many facing a workload increase, staffing issues, drug use and miscommunication (oral or written) are all culpable.

And the number of incidents is rising, up tens of thousands of patient safety or medical errors from just a few years ago. It's not an exaggeration to call it a system in crisis, where one in three Americans say they or a family member have experienced a medical error.

So how does Congress address this crisis? Health Care Week, introduced by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) in early May, was intended to "deliver to the American people a system that works."

The bill, sponsored by Sen. John Ensign (R-Nev.) and co-sponsored by 17 other Republicans, does not take the burden off well-meaning health care providers. It does nothing to address the malpractice of doctors, hospitals or nursing homes. But it does limit your ability to do so.

Echoing Florida's Amendment Three from a few years ago, Ensign's legislation protects insurance companies by capping at \$250,000 all

awards to citizens done wrong by doctors or hospitals.

Protecting insurance companies from the rising cost of malpractice claims operates on the false assumption that medical malpractice suits are driving up the cost of health care. The truth is that malpractice costs amount to less than 2 percent of overall health care spending and the number of medical malpractice claims continues to fall. In Florida, of every six reports of a medical error by Florida hospitals, only one lawsuit is filed.

Why then do malpractice insurance rates continue to rise? Between 2000 and 2004, insurers increased premiums 134 percent.

The General Account Office found the medical malpractice liability "crisis" is a myth.

Malpractice insurers

hurt by reductions in investments from 1998 to 2001 had to hike premiums to cover a larger share of costs.

Often, the legal system is all we have to ensure just compensation for the death or injury of loved ones. Congress should focus on ways to decrease the death toll from medical errors rather than drastically limit compensation for victims and strip them of their constitutional rights to hold accountable those responsible for medical negligence, death or disability.

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) has introduced a bill directed toward medical malpractice insurance reform, calling the GOP on the very assumption that lawsuits are driving up the cost of health care.

"The fact is, there is one place that makes money. Claims go down and insurance premiums go up. It is like the rising gas prices and the record oil company profits. Maybe we ought to be asking medical malpractice insurers exactly why their premiums are so exorbitant," says Leahy.

Malpractice litigation reform efforts are misguided. A close diagnosis of the myths of the insurance lobby might be just what the doctor ordered. **EF**

**Be sure to catch Eddie Farah's live call-in radio show noon to 1 p.m. every Saturday on 690 WOKV AM! The call-in number is 340-0690.**

## HAPPENINGS

month at the circle across from the Bridge of Lions, downtown St. Augustine. 825-6746.

### OUTDOOR EVENTS

#### CRESCENT BEACH CHALLENGE

This eighth annual fundraiser is held throughout the day on June 17 at the Mary Street beach access ramp, 1.5 miles north of Crescent Beach. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m. for various race events, including paddling, swimming and running skills challenges. Proceeds benefit those affected by leukemia, lymphoma and other blood-related cancers. (352) 378-8090.

#### SEGWAY GUIDED TOURS ON FT. GEORGE

Cross-terrain Segways are available for tours of the natural and ecological preserve. Tours are two hours, twice a day, 10 a.m.-noon and from 2-4 p.m. Wed. through Sun. One-hour tours are also offered. For reservations or prices, call 251-9477.

#### BLACK CREEK OUTFITTERS

Kayak instruction is offered from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. every Sun. • Half-day and day kayak trips are also offered • Two-hour climbing sessions for beginners are held from 8:30-11:30 a.m. every Sat. Admission is \$50 • 10051 Skinner Lake Drive, Jacksonville. For reservations, call 645-7003.

#### KAYAK EXPERIENCE

The Great Outdoors Kayak Experience offers backwater tours for small groups. For reservations, call 755-8080.

#### ARMY NAVY OUTDOORS

A free kayak outing is offered on the second Sat. of each month. A free kayak demonstration is offered on every remaining Sat. • Army Navy is located at 127 Monument Road, Jacksonville. For directions to the sites, call 725-5000.

#### OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Guided coastal kayaking and canoeing trips for small groups and corporate outings are offered. Destinations include the Barrier Islands, Timucuan Preserve, St. Augustine and the St. Johns River. For departure times and locations, call 393-9030.

#### NAUTICAL ESCAPES

Kayaking with dolphins is offered during the Ocean Kayak Tour from 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m. every Sun. • A trip to Dutton Island features kayaking and hiking from 8:30-11 a.m. Mon.-Fri. • A sunset outing is offered from 7:30-9:30 p.m. daily • Admission to all tours is \$40 • 568-0284.

#### ECOLOGICAL TOURS

Daily kayaking ecological tours

are offered from Gecko Latitudes in St. Augustine. For departure times and locations, call 824-7979.

#### FLORIDA SEA KAYAKING ASSOCIATION

Free kayak events are held throughout the year. For a schedule of events, call 699-3720.

#### SIDETRACKERS

This outdoors singles club meets at 6:30 p.m. on the first Wed. of every month at the Southeast Regional Library, 10599 Deerwood Park Blvd. Jacksonville. 821-6707.

#### KAYAK ADVENTURES

Offering weekly guided kayaking tours in Guana State Park, Timucuan Preserve and other Northeast Florida locations. Beginner and advanced instruction available. Kayaking tours for the disabled are offered. 249-6200.

## WRITING, BOOKS AND LITERATURE

#### DA VINCI CODE DISCUSSION

The Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach presents Jacksonville University's Jay Wright, who speaks on "The Da Vinci Code: First the Book, Now the Movie," at 4 p.m. on June 17 at the Center, 50 Executive Way, Ponte Vedra Beach. Admission is \$5 for members, \$8 for non-members. Additional discussions are held on June 25 and July 8. 280-0614.

#### BARNES & NOBLE MANDARIN

"A Night of Pirates" is held at 7 p.m. on June 15. POW! Member Joseph O'Steen speaks and signs his books "Falcon's Revenge" and "Pursuit of Honor." POW! Protégés, a workshop for young writers and artists (ages 10-18) is also featured • Kids' storytime in Spanish is held at 10:30 a.m. on the second Tuesday of the month • A short-story and creative writing class is offered at 6:30 p.m. on the second Tue. of every month • Promoting Outstanding Writers meets at 11 a.m. on the third Sat. of every month • 11112 San Jose Blvd., Ste. 8, Jacksonville. 886-9904.

#### ECKANKAR BOOK DISCUSSION

The book "Animals Are Soul, Too!" is discussed at 7 p.m. on June 20 at Barnes & Noble, 11112 San Jose Blvd., Jacksonville. 725-7760.

#### FIRST COAST ROMANCE WRITERS

This group gets together from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. every second Sat. of each month at the West Regional Branch Library, 1425 Chaffee Road, Jacksonville. Admission is \$25. 268-0707.

#### HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION

Books of interest to humanists are discussed at 2 p.m. on the third Sun. of every month at Borders Books and Music, 8801 Southside Blvd., Jacksonville. 996-1553.

#### LITERACY COALITION

The Clay County Literacy Coalition gets together at 4 p.m. on the third Tue. of each month at Orange Park High School's Adult Education Wing, 2300 Kingsley Ave., Orange Park. The "Tutor Round Table" meets from 7-8:30 p.m. on the third Thur. of each month at the Orange Park Library, 2054 Plainfield Ave., Orange Park. 272-8154.

#### NOVEL INTO FILM DISCUSSION

A film is shown at 2:30 p.m. on the second Sat. of each month and a discussion of the film — and the book on which it's based — is held at 6:30 p.m. the following Wed., at Pablo Creek Regional Branch Library, 13295 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville. 992-7101.

#### WILLOWBRANCH LIBRARY EVENTS

A fiction and non-fiction book club gets together at 10:30 a.m. on the second Tue. of each month and at 7 p.m. on the last Thur. of each month • The Graphic Novel Club gets together at 7 p.m. on the third Wed. of each month • 2875 Park St., Jacksonville. 381-8490.

#### WORLD LITERATURE BOOK CLUB

World lit books and authors are discussed at 7 p.m. on the third Wed. of every month at various restaurants around Northeast Florida. For locations and topics, call 207-1222.

#### WRITING WORKSHOP

The Shantyboat Writer's Workshop is held from 6:30-9 p.m. every Wed. on the Trout River in Jacksonville. Classes are limited to 10 writers. To reserve a seat, call 778-8000.

## SPOKEN WORD & POETRY

#### CHRISTIAN POETICS

Open mic poetry night is held at 6 p.m. on the last Sat. of each month at The Love of Christ Community Church, 1481 E. 16th St., Jacksonville. 703-6585.

#### FRIDAY NIGHT POETRY

DemFolk Poets appear at 9 p.m. every Fri. at The Comedy Act Café, 3325 Plymouth St., Ste. 16, Jacksonville. 704-6650.

#### OPEN-MIC POETRY

Open-mic poetry is featured at 9 p.m. every Fri. at Ribs On Wheels BBQ Café, 626 May St., Jacksonville. 358-2644.