

Reporting medical errors protects the public in many ways. Despite laws that require medical providers to report medical errors, they frequently choose not to comply. Washington State is one of 27 states which require reporting of serious medical errors but it frequently fails to enforce adequate reporting. Reporting requirements are designed to identify errors so that similar harm to patients can be avoided in the future.

The [Seattle Post Intelligencer](#) recently pointed out the case of Gary William Clezie as a case in point. Mr. Clezie reportedly died from medication errors related to outpatient shoulder surgery at one of Seattle's largest medical institutions. The hospital where he underwent the surgery never reported the error to the appropriate regulatory agency as required.

According to the article "[e]xperts say error reporting and analysis leads to improved care over time and ultimately saves lives." Consider though a **federal study** released in March which concluded underreporting is the norm: the Health and Human Services Inspector General reported that 93 percent of serious adverse events in hospitals went undetected by the hospitals' own internal reporting systems. Leading experts on health care errors believe these institutions fear loss of reputation or medical malpractice lawsuits as the basis for not reporting or even underreporting medical errors. Yet the more analysis suggests that in doing so they fail to analyze and correct systemic problems that give rise to repeated medical malpractice actions - such as medication errors. They then perpetuate the problems which continue to harm or kill their patients from preventable negligence. Another consideration is that patients are entitled to know about the health care they receive including that they received inappropriate care - how else can they make intelligent health care choices?

By taking ownership of medical errors the medical community can prevent similar errors from being repeated. Even while refusing to comply with laws that require them to report medical errors, physicians and the health care corporate community are pursuing ever increasing measures to limit patients' right to bring civil actions arising from their negligence. This is despite evidence that limiting civil actions does not deter medical negligence but rather allows the medical community to hide errors from their patients. The obligation to report medical errors will improve medicine and will perhaps change the culture of the medical community to avoid its problems.