

Require Random Drug and Alcohol Tests for Doctors, Experts Advise



Patient safety experts are urging hospitals to require physicians to have random drug and alcohol tests.

The tests should also be conducted if a patient dies suddenly or is injured unexpectedly during surgery, they write in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

In a commentary published in the journal, the experts say that if a doctor is found to be impaired, the hospital could suspend or revoke their medical license, according to The Baltimore Sun. The incident in some cases could be reported to the state licensing board, wrote Dr. Julius Cuong Pham, an emergency medicine physician at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Dr. Peter J. Pronovost, Director of the Johns Hopkins Armstrong Institute for Patient Safety and Quality, and Dr. Gregory E. Skipper of the drug and alcohol treatment center Promises, in Santa Monica, California.

They recommend impaired physicians undergo treatment and routine monitoring, as a condition for continued licensure and hospital privileges.

"Patients might be better protected from preventable harm. Physicians and employers may experience reduced absenteeism, unintentional adverse events, injuries, and turnover, and early identification of a debilitating problem," the doctors added. They note that physicians are as susceptible to alcohol, narcotic and sedative addiction as the general public.

"Patients and their family members have a right to be protected from impaired physicians," they conclude. "In other high-risk industries, this right is supported by regulations and surveillance. Shouldn't medicine be the same? A robust system to identify impaired physicians may enhance the professionalism that peer review seeks to protect."