

Why Can't Medicine Seem To Fix Simple Mistakes?

NYU's Langone Medical Center announced this week that it was adopting new procedures after the death of a 12-year old boy from septic shock. The hospital's emergency room sent Rory Staunton home in March and then failed to notify his doctor or family of lab results showing he was suffering from a raging infection.

In response to the case, which was closely covered by The New York Times, the hospital promised a bunch of basic fixes: ER doctors should be immediately notified of certain abnormal lab results and, if such results come in after a patient is sent home, the hospital should call the patient and his doctor.

As veteran health reporters, we wish we could tell you that this case will spur changes in emergency rooms across the nation, that never again will a hospital make such an avoidable mistake. But, sadly, decades of experience covering such incidents suggest the medical system may prove resistant to change. Forget about every hospital rewriting its procedures. History suggests it would be a victory if NYU Langone manages to follow its own new rules as we all hope they will.

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