

'Thousands' Of Errors Made By Surgeons

Skeptical Scalpel

Over the last few days, stories about “thousands of errors made by surgeons” have received a lot of media and Internet attention. All of this was the result of a paper from Johns Hopkins that says surgeons leave an object in 40 patients per week, perform wrong site surgery on 20 patients per week and perform the wrong operation altogether in 20 patients per week.

The paper reported 9,744 such errors in a review of the National Practitioner Data Bank over the 20 years from 1990 to 2010. I'd love to tell you how they extrapolated from 9,744, which over 20 years averages 9.4 such errors per week, to 80 per week, but the paper is not accessible to those who do not subscribe to the journal Surgery.

I agree with those who say these are “never” events that are totally preventable and should never happen.

But I want to set the record straight.

Listen to me. Surgeons are not the cause of sponges being left in patients. I'll explain.

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