Most Common Medical Malpractice Claims For Missed Cancer, Heart Attacks

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Medical malpractice can be a nightmare for both patients and doctors. A large new study takes a close look at claims to get an idea where most of these cases are coming from.

For the study, published in BMJ Open [1]July 18, Irish researchers reviewed more than 7,150 journal papers on medical malpractice claims.

They were looking specifically at claims for primary care doctors, since these physicians are often the first line of care for patients seeking treatment for health woes. Of the studies, researchers included 34 journal articles in their analysis of primary care malpractice: Fifteen based in the U.S., nine British studies, seven Australian studies, two French papers and one by Canadian researchers.

They found the most common malpractice claims were missed diagnoses, accounting for between 26 percent and 63 percent of total claims based on their research, depending on the study. Death was the most common consequence listed in missed diagnosis claims, found in between 15 percent and 48 percent of these cases.

The most common missed diagnoses for adults were cancer and heart attacks. Other that were commonly-occurring were appendicitis, ectopic pregnancy and bone fractures. For children, the most missed diagnoses were related to meningitis and cancers.

Falling behind missed diagnoses in terms of total malpractice claims were drug errors, which were seen in between 6 percent and 20 percent of the claims the researchers looked at, depending on the study. The researchers found steroid preparations, antibiotics, anticoagulants, antidepressants and antipsychotics were cited in claims in some of the studies they looked at.

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