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13 California hospitals fined for medical errors

State Department of Public Health officials require hospital officials to submit plans to correct the problems, which in some cases killed or seriously injured patients.

By Molly Hennessy-Fiske

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State officials have fined 13 California hospitals for medical errors that in some cases killed or seriously injured patients, according to a [report made public Wednesday](#).

California Department of Public Health officials have required hospital officials -- who may appeal the fines -- to submit plans to correct the problems.

Three hospitals in Los Angeles County face penalties.

[Los Angeles Community Hospital in Norwalk](#) was fined \$50,000 in connection with the death of a patient in May who was supposed to be restrained and supervised, but was instead left to repeatedly pull out his tracheotomy tube until he was found unresponsive in his bed. Hospital staff referred questions to spokeswoman Ellen Shin, who did not return calls.

[California Hospital Medical Center](#) was fined \$50,000 after a medical resident in the emergency room misdiagnosed a woman in March with an ectopic pregnancy. The woman was not pregnant and the chemotherapy drugs she was treated with suppressed her immune system and caused mouth, throat and skin sores.

The hospital has since restricted residents' access to the drug and required pharmacy staff to closely monitor how the drug is dispensed.

"We responded to the incident appropriately, reported it promptly and took long-term corrective action in a timely manner," said Katreena Salgado, a hospital spokeswoman.

[Marina del Rey Hospital](#) was fined \$25,000 after intensive care nurses failed to monitor a woman's oxygen levels in March 2007; the patient passed out and had to be placed on a ventilator.



In Orange County, three hospitals were each fined \$50,000.

[St. Jude Medical Center in Fullerton](#) was fined in connection with the death of a patient treated in the emergency room for a heart attack in February. Investigators found nurses failed to notice that the man's heart monitor had disconnected. Chief Medical Officer Michael Marino released a statement Wednesday saying an internal investigation showed the volume on the patient's heart monitor alarm was not loud enough to alert staff. He said the hospital has since added engineering controls for the monitors, and checked the alarms and staff training. The hospital does not plan to appeal, a spokeswoman said.

[Western Medical Center in Santa Ana](#) faced its second fine in the last year after staff left a surgical sponge in a patient in March. She got sick and had to undergo a second operation.

At [Hoag Memorial Hospital in Newport Beach](#), investigators found a patient on a metal gurney was sucked in by an MRI machine's magnetic force in January 2009, fracturing her leg and foot. It was the hospital's third penalty in the last two years. The hospital's chief executive, Dr. Richard Afable, said the staff was retrained and the hospital does not plan to appeal the fine.

In Riverside County, John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Indio got four \$25,000 fines for failing to monitor patients and medication in 2008.

The state has issued 134 fines since they were first required by law in January 2007, said Kathleen Billingsley, deputy director of the department's Center for Health Care Quality. In all, 90 hospitals have been fined and the state has collected \$2.3 million. Twenty-two of the fines have been appealed, Billingsley said.

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