

## POSTER ABSTRACTS

11<sup>th</sup> Annual HMO Research Network Conference

April 4-6, 2005 Santa Fe, NM

Other  
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### Disclosure of Medical Errors: The Impact of Waiving Costs and Prior Relationship

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**Background:** Disclosure of medical errors is encouraged, but systematic research on the impact of specific practices is limited. This study examined whether an offer to waive costs associated with an error or a positive physician-patient relationship prior to the error influenced patients' responses to disclosure of a medical error, over and above the level of disclosure, the type of error, and the clinical outcome.

**Methods:** 407 adult members of a New England-based health plan were recruited. Each subject listened to a description of a medical error and viewed a video of a simulated physician-patient dialogue about the error. Three factors were completely crossed: type of error, severity of adverse clinical outcome, and level of disclosure. Two additional factors were varied within error type: an offer to waive costs (vs. no offer) and a reference to a prior positive relationship with the physician (vs. no reference). Subjects were randomly assigned to conditions. Questionnaires assessed likelihood of changing physicians, likelihood of seeking legal advice, patient satisfaction, trust and emotional response.

**Results:** Results suggest that offering to waive costs did not reduce the likelihood of seeking legal advice. Instead, in the absence of full disclosure, offering to waive costs may reduce trust and increase the likelihood of seeking legal advice. A positive physician-patient relationship prior to the error was associated with higher satisfaction, but the statistical evidence was not strong ( $p=.075$ ). Full disclosure reduced the likelihood of changing physicians, and resulted in more favorable responses in terms of patient satisfaction, trust and emotional response. Full disclosure did not affect intention to seek legal advice.

**Conclusions:** In the absence of full disclosure, offering to waive the costs associated with a medical error may reduce trust, and increase the likelihood that a patient will seek legal advice. A pre-existing, positive, physician-patient relationship may result in greater patient satisfaction even after an error, but does not appear to influence other outcomes.

This study was supported by a grant from the National Patient Safety Foundation  
and the Commonwealth Fund (20030288).