

SPECIAL HEALTH ISSUE How to Feel Better Than Ever!

AARP

The Magazine

Real Possibilities

EXCLUSIVE REPORT

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Decades after his Parkinson's diagnosis, the actor is grateful for his close-knit family... and a new TV series!

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Mom has dementia. My dad can't see it.

By Alex Witchel

Lessons From America's Safest Hospitals

More than 180,000 people die every year from hospital errors. Here's what the top medical centers are doing to improve your odds

By BETH HOWARD / Photograph by JOHN KEATLEY

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On November 4, 2004, Mary McClinton, a beloved 69-year-old social worker and mother of four, checked into Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle for a relatively complex but routine procedure to treat a brain aneurysm. Doctors planned to inject her with a contrast dye to help them guide a stent into her brain, via a catheter in her leg, to repair the aneurysm. Instead, they injected her with an antiseptic—a topical cleaning agent—that had been stored in an unlabeled container on the same tray as the dye. The antiseptic blocked the

flow of blood in her leg, which swelled to twice its normal size. Within hours, McClinton's blood pressure dropped, her kidneys failed, and she suffered a stroke. As the toxin coursed through her system, her other organs began to fail as well. Nineteen agonizing days later, surrounded by her grief-stricken family and friends, Mary McClinton died, her son Gerald holding her hand.

Tragically, McClinton's case is far from unique. An estimated 6,000 “never events”—egregious errors like operations on the wrong limb or instruments left inside a surgical wound—occur every month among Medicare patients alone, according to a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The total number of preventable errors is far higher—some studies suggest that up to a third of all hospital admissions result in harm to a patient. And a 2010 study from HHS estimates that 180,000 Medicare beneficiaries die every year from accidents and errors.

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Top Hospitals for Safety

Best Practices
Find out what each of these hospitals does to enhance patient safety at aarp.org/safehospitals.



- **Allegheny General Hospital**
Pittsburgh, Pa.
- **Brigham and Women's Hospital**
Boston, Mass.
- **Detroit Receiving Hospital/University Health Center**
Detroit, Mich.
- **Geisinger Medical Center**
Danville, Pa.
- **Indiana University Health La Porte Hospital**
La Porte, Ind.
- **Baystate Medical Center**
Springfield, Mass.
- **California Pacific Medical Center**
San Francisco, Calif.
- **Dublin Methodist Hospital**
Dublin, Ohio
- **Grinnell Regional Medical Center**
Grinnell, Iowa
- **Inova Fair Oaks Hospital**
Fairfax, Va.
- **Bellevue Hospital Center**
New York, N.Y.
- **Central Maine Medical Center**
Lewiston, Maine
- **Englewood Hospital and Medical Center**
Englewood, N.J.
- **Hackensack University Medical Center**
Hackensack, N.J.
- **Inova Loudoun Hospital**
Leesburg, Va.
- **Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center**
Boston, Mass.
- **The Christ Hospital**
Cincinnati, Ohio
- **Fairview Southdale Hospital**
Edina, Minn.
- **Harper-Hutzel Hospital**
Detroit, Mich.
- **JFK Medical Center of Atlantis**
Atlantis, Fla.
- **Billings Clinic**
Billings, Mont.
- **Cleveland Clinic Florida**
Weston, Fla.
- **Homestead Hospital**
Homestead, Fla.
- **Kaiser Permanente**
Multiple locations

- **Lahey Clinic**
Burlington, Mass.
- **Northwestern Memorial Hospital**
Chicago, Ill.
- **Spectrum Health Blodgett Hospital**
Grand Rapids, Mich.
- **Takoma Regional Hospital**
Greeneville, Tenn.
- **Valley Hospital**
Ridgewood, N.J.
- **Lehigh Valley Hospital**
Allentown, Pa.
- **OSF St. Joseph Medical Center**
Bloomington, Ill.
- **St. David's Georgetown Hospital**
Georgetown, Texas
- **Vanderbilt University Hospital**
Nashville, Tenn.
- **Mayo Clinic Hospital**
Phoenix, Ariz.
- **The Queen's Medical Center**
Honolulu, Hawaii
- **St. David's Medical Center**
Austin, Texas
- **Vassar Brothers Medical Center**
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.
- **The Methodist Hospital**
Houston, Texas
- **Regions Hospital**
St. Paul, Minn.
- **St. Francis Hospital Downtown**
Greenville, S.C.
- **Tufts Medical Center**
Boston, Mass.
- **Mills-Peninsula Health Services**
Burlingame, Calif.
- **Rush University Medical Center**
Chicago, Ill.
- **St. Mary's Hospital of Rochester**
Rochester, Minn.
- **University Hospitals Case Medical Center**
Cleveland, Ohio
- **Montefiore Medical Center**
Bronx, N.Y.
- **Sentara CarePlex Hospital**
Hampton, Va.
- **St. Vincent Indianapolis Hospital**
Indianapolis, Ind.
- **University of California Davis Medical Center**
Sacramento, Calif.
- **MultiCare Good Samaritan Hospital**
Puyallup, Wash.
- **Sentara Leigh Hospital**
Norfolk, Va.
- **Stanford Hospital and Clinics**
Stanford, Calif.
- **Northern Westchester Hospital**
Mount Kisco, N.Y.
- **Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center**
Williamsburg, Va.
- **Sutter Tracy Community Hospital**
Tracy, Calif.
- **NorthShore University Health-System—Skokie Hospital**
Skokie, Ill.
- **Sibley Memorial Hospital**
Washington, D.C.
- **Swedish Medical Center First Hill Campus**
Seattle, Wash.
- **Skyline Medical Center**
Nashville, Tenn.
- **USMD Hospital at Arlington**
Arlington, Texas
- **Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center**
Winston-Salem, N.C.
- **West Palm Hospital**
West Palm Beach, Fla.
- **Wyoming Medical Center**
Casper, Wyo.

THE LEAPFROGGROUP
While these hospitals are safety superstars, others have received an "A" Hospital Safety Score from The Leapfrog Group, which rates hospitals on safety and resource use. To find the "A" hospitals near you, log on to hospitalsafetyscore.org or download the free Hospital Safety Score app through Apple's App Store or Google's Android market.

"Preventable hospital errors are a terrible danger to American families and a huge driver of unnecessary health costs," says Leah Binder, president and CEO of The Leapfrog Group, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that assesses hospitals on national standards of safety, quality and efficiency.

To draw attention to the tragic reality of cases like McClinton's, AARP THE MAGAZINE has teamed up with Leapfrog to showcase what some of the most innovative hospitals are doing to prevent errors. With its Hospital

Safety Score, Leapfrog rates institutions on 26 measures of safety—including "never events," infection rates from IV and catheter lines, secondary infections, and hospital-acquired conditions like pressure ulcers and air embolisms—using data it compiles from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the American Hospital Association and the Leapfrog Hospital Survey.

One surprising standout: Virginia Mason. In fact, for the past seven years Leapfrog has consistently given the hospital

high ratings. Based on the nonprofit's survey, it even named Virginia Mason a top hospital of the decade in 2010. So what was behind the remarkable turnaround? In short, Virginia Mason made becoming the safest hospital in America a top priority. Even before McClinton's death, it launched an investigation into the error, and later issued public and private apologies to her family. The hospital, which had already started to revamp its safety procedures, redoubled its efforts, systematically implementing new safety protocols

across every area of the hospital. Administrators nearly tripled the time that nurses spent at the bedside, instituted checklists before surgeries and established patient safety alerts, which empowered any employee to speak up when a patient's life or health was at risk.

"The hospitals that are transforming health care put patient safety above all," says Lucian Leape, M.D., cofounder of the National Patient Safety Foundation. Of Virginia Mason, he says, "We wish we could clone them."