

# Study: physician time pressures the cause of primary care misdiagnoses

For better or worse, it is a familiar goal in business today to do more with less. According to a recent study, when it comes to healthcare, such an attitude is definitely worse. The study, published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, found that primary care doctors often do not have enough time to spend enough time with their patients. As a result, this raises the probability of a [misdiagnosis](#) and causes overall patient care to suffer.

Researchers in the study reviewed medical records of 212,165 office visits over the course of a year to 69 physicians and healthcare professionals at a Veterans Affairs primary care facility and at four private clinics. In particular, researchers focused on office visits where the patient had to visit an emergency care facility, the hospital or an emergency room within two weeks of the original visit.

From the information contained in the medical records of the initial office visits of these patients, the researchers determined whether the primary care physician could have used the information available at the time to accurately diagnose the patient's condition that was ultimately responsible for the subsequent hospitalization or visit to the emergency room.

Having identified instances where the primary care physician made a misdiagnosis or [failed to diagnose](#) the correct condition, the researchers identified the reasons for the error. It was found that the majority of errors were caused because:

- The physician made an error in taking or interpreting the patient's medical history.
- There was a failure to order or timely follow up on a diagnostic test.
- The physician failed to conduct a thorough physical examination of the patient.
- A diagnostic test was misinterpreted.
- The physician failed to consult with an expert or specialist, as warranted by the condition.
- The seriousness of the condition was not recognized, for miscellaneous reasons.

The principal author of the study, Dr. Hardeep Singh, speculated that the physician's workload

is at the root of the problem. As physicians are spending more of their time on administrative work and are seeing more patients per day than they did in the past, they have less time to devote to each patient. According to Dr. Singh, less time with the patients causes physicians to make their diagnoses based on the patient's chief complaint, rather than on a thorough examination.

### **Consult a medical malpractice attorney**

Although many primary care physicians are under pressure from insurance companies and the desire to maximize their profits, this is not an excuse for substandard medical care. If you or a loved one has suffered as a result of a misdiagnosis, contact an experienced medical malpractice attorney to learn about your right to compensation under the law.