

Study suggests anesthesia errors could be avoided with better IV labels

On behalf of [Raymond Slomski](#)

A study found that easier to read IV bags may make surgical patients safer.

When you are having a surgical procedure, you probably are worried about many things. However, the design of IV bags used during the operation probably are not among them. Unfortunately, the findings of a recent study published in the *Journal of Patient Safety* may give you cause to change your mind. The study found that traditionally labeled IV bags, which have the drug information printed on one side of a clear bag, may significantly raise the possibility of a major type of surgical error: an [anesthesia error](#).

Details of study

The study involved 96 anesthesia trainees at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. The trainees were asked to perform two separate simulated surgical procedures. The procedures were based on a real-life occurrence where an IV bag of lidocaine (a local anesthetic) was almost used instead of a bag of hetastarch, which is used to prevent shock from blood loss during surgery. Fortunately, in real life, the error was caught in time to prevent the patient from dying from the mistake.

During each of the two procedures, the trainees used an IV cart that was improperly stocked with lidocaine in the same drawer with the hetastarch. During the first round, the IV bags in the drawers had standard clear labels. However, for the second procedure, researchers substituted bags with redesigned labeling, which had two-sided labels printed on opaque paper with large white letters on a dark background. During both simulated procedures, a surgeon requested an emergency administration of hetastarch, prompting the trainees to select the correct medication from the drawer.

The accuracy of the trainees' performances varied wildly between the two procedures. In the first procedure with the standard labels, 60 percent of the trainees incorrectly picked the lidocaine instead of the hetastarch. However, during the procedure with the redesigned labels, the trainees were over 2 times as likely to pick the correct medication. According to the researchers, the results proved that a simple label change prevented a potentially catastrophic

error from occurring.

If injured, get legal help

In real life, when an anesthesiologist makes a [medication error](#) during surgery, the results are often very serious. Victims of this type of error can suffer brain damage, paralysis or coma. Sadly, in many cases, the error is serious enough to be fatal.

If you or a loved one have been injured by this type of error, you may be able to recover compensation for your lost wages, medical bills and pain and suffering under Arizona law. Likewise, if the error was fatal, compensation may be sought in a wrongful death lawsuit. To learn more about your rights, speak to an experienced medical malpractice attorney. An attorney can work with experts to determine the cause of the error and advise you further on your legal right to hold the responsible party accountable.