

OPINION

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

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Human error

Re "Quaid: Allow lawsuits against drug companies":

Though I'm happy to learn that Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Quaid's twins continue to thrive after their harrowing and near tragic accidental overdose of Heparin, I must strongly disagree with them in their attempt to hold Baxter Pharmaceuticals culpable.

As a registered nurse whose specialty is PICU/NICU and having familiarized myself with the case, it is clear that though one can blame Big Pharma for many things, the incident involving the Quaid twins is not one of them.

The fault lies with Cedars-Sinai and the nurses who failed to follow not only hospital policy, but also nursing protocol. These failures were documented in the state's investigation and they included such critical omissions as: The hospital's failure to implement its own policy in handling Heparin that was amended after both Baxter and the FDA sent out warning letters and the failure of both nurses to read the label prior to signing off and administering this medication.

In addition, one can only wonder why Cedars chose to continue to hold onto and use the old stock of Heparin (this is the stock that both Baxter, the FDA and other health-care experts had identified as having a label that could lead to just such a tragic outcome) instead of replacing it with the newer stock with the redesigned label.

As any nurse can tell you, there are certain drugs, and Heparin is one of them, with which nurses are trained to always use the double-check procedure. This means that first one nurse reads the label and checks the dosage, the patient, the route of administration and the time, and then another nurse repeats this procedure before administering the medication. This is a standard nursing procedure that transcends all hospital policies and it's basic Nursing 101.

The Quaid's are understandably angry and concerned — we all should be. However, for Congress to pander and invite Dennis Quaid to testify before them on this issue shouldn't be in the purview of Congress. If Quaid had wanted to make a real impact, then he should be lobbying at the state level about how Cedars allowed such a failure to occur on their watch.

In addition, he should be asking the Board of Registered Nursing to investigate the breakdown of nursing that nearly cost the lives of his children. This was not a product failure, since the product did exactly as it should have; instead this was a failure of the nurses to exercise good judgment and practice standard nursing protocols that have been developed to protect patients from just such an occurrence.

Geneviève M. Clavreul
PASADENA

Quaid: Allow lawsuits against drug companies

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Actor Dennis Quaid told Congress on Wednesday that taking away the right to sue pharmaceutical companies would turn consumers into "uninformed and uncompensated lab rats."

Quaid's comments came as he described a harrowing, near-fatal drug mix-up in which his newborn twins received 1,000 times the correct dose of the blood thinner heparin.

The actor said his family's brush with tragedy underscores the need to hold pharmaceutical companies accountable through lawsuits. That remedy is becoming increasingly problematic for injured consumers.

The drug's maker, Baxter Healthcare Corp., said it regrets that a product intended to save and sustain life was at the center of a medication error.

Beginning with the Bush administration, the Food and Drug Administration has stepped into suits on the side of defendant pharmaceutical companies, arguing that federal regulation of drugs pre-empts state suits.

"The regulatory cop is off the beat," Georgetown University law professor David Vladeck told the House Reform and Government Oversight Committee.

The issue of federal pre-emption of suits against the drug industry will come before the Supreme Court this year in a case from Vermont.