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A header for the 'Texas on the Potomac' blog. It features a small image of the Texas state capitol building on the left. To the right of the image is the text '☆ chron | Nation & world | Politics'. The main title 'Texas on the Potomac' is written in a large, black, serif font. Below the title is the subtitle 'Washington news with a Texas accent' in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

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April 13, 2010

Dennis Quaid speaks out on medical mistakes

Actor Dennis Quaid on Monday urged victims of medical mistakes to tell their stories publicly as a way of putting pressure on health professionals to reduce errors.

"Awareness is more than just knowing, it's about feeling, feeling the pain and suffering of the victims [of medical mistakes] and their families," Quaid said at a luncheon at the National Press Club.

Quaid's involvement in the issue began in 2007 when hospital personnel gave his newborn twins overdoses of the blood thinner Heparin. The doses were 1,000 times more powerful than what the twins should have received.



AP photo/Donna McWilliam

Hospital staff members had misread labels on Heparin and mistakenly given the twins the stronger version instead of the weaker one, Quaid said.

The children survived, but the incident inspired Quaid to become an advocate for safer practices.

"We don't have bad people, we have bad systems," he said.

Quaid is the star of movies including "Great Balls of Fire," "The Day After Tomorrow," "The Rookie," "The Big Easy," and "The Alamo." He was a Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild best supporting actor nominee for his role in "Far from Heaven."

Dr. Charles Denham, chairman and founder of the Texas Medical Institute of Technology, worked with Quaid to write an article on how accounts of needless errors and the pain and suffering they cause help raise awareness about medical mistakes.

"Dennis shared with us the power of storytelling and how you connect the heart with the head and then the hands," said.

Quaid is the narrator of a documentary "Chasing Zero: Winning the War on Healthcare Harm" which will premier this month and air on the Discovery Channel.

His speech at the National Press Club coincided with the announcement of new additions to a medical safety list maintained by a major medical safety organization, the National Quality Forum.

The forum added new sections to its list of 34 safe hospital practices. The recommendations include ways for patients and their families to prevent medical mistakes by, for instance, asking questions about medications or procedures and carrying a list of prescribed medications.

"Patient safety really is a team sport, and the patient and family members have to be a part of that team," said Dr. Helen Burstin, senior vice president for performance measures at the forum.

The National Quality Forum is a private, nonprofit group that sets voluntary standards for health care performance.

Every year approximately 200,000 American patients die preventable deaths due to medical errors.

Eleven years ago, a highly publicized federal report, "To Err is Human," called the death toll from medical errors shocking and challenged the medical community to cut it in half within five years. Instead, federal analysts believe the rate of medical error is actually increasing.

A national investigation by Hearst Newspapers last year found that the medical community, the federal government and most states have overwhelmingly failed to take the effective steps outlined in the 1999 report a decade ago.

Posted by [Katie Brandenburg](#) at April 13, 2010 10:00 AM

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