



# Dennis Quaid takes aim at health care mistakes

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By Rita Rubin, USA TODAY



By Joe Brier, for USA TODAY

After his newborn twins nearly died because they'd received an overdose of a drug in a hospital, actor Dennis Quaid became a patient safety advocate. Quaid spoke about his efforts with members of the National Press Club April 12 in Washington, D.C.

as they toured the hospital to learn about systems to prevent medical errors.

Children's Medical Center Dallas

WASHINGTON — As a private pilot, actor Dennis Quaid was struck by the differences between how aviation errors and medical errors are handled.

The airline industry doesn't have much choice, Quaid noted in an interview Monday after speaking at a National Press Club luncheon. "When a crash happens, it's so public," he said. "No one is going to fly on their airplanes unless they have that trust."

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But when a mistake occurs in a hospital, the public might never hear about it. Although an estimated 100,000 Americans die each year because of medical errors, their deaths are scattered over thousands of hospitals, "where people die anyway," Quaid said. "It doesn't get the same type of attention."



Actor Dennis Quaid and his wife Kimberly Buffington listen to staff at the Children's Medical Center Dallas

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But when it happens to a movie star's newborn babies — as it did on that terrible day in November 2007 when Quaid's 10-day-old twins were twice given an adult dose of the blood thinner heparin — at a respected hospital like [Cedars-Sinai Medical Center](#) in Los Angeles, it does.

And now Quaid has become the self-described "frontman" for a campaign to improve patient care with the implementation of "safe practices" as simple as hand-washing and the use of technologies such as bar codes to match medications to patients. After the overdose that nearly killed his twins, Quaid said, Cedars-Sinai "stepped up to the plate and spent millions of dollars on bedside bar codes." And he and his wife, Kimberly, created the Quaid Foundation, which has merged with the Texas Medical Institute of Technology, an Austin-based research organization.

"My mission today is to drive awareness ... awareness of both the harm and the opportunity to save countless lives," Quaid told the luncheon audience.

He has produced a documentary, *Chasing Zero: Winning the War on Healthcare Harm*, which makes its debut April 22 at the Global Patient Safety Summit in Nice, France, where Quaid will be the keynote speaker. It airs April 24, May 1 and May 8 on the [Discovery Channel](#). Quaid also co-wrote an article in the March issue of the *Journal of Patient Safety*, "Story Power: The Secret Weapon."

"I never imagined a couple of years ago that I would be reading medical journals," Quaid said, let alone writing for them.

Quaid's twins, Thomas Boone and Zoe Grace,

who were born to a gestational surrogate, were readmitted to the hospital for treatment of a staph infection. Each twice received an adult dose of 10,000 units of heparin to flush out their IV tubes and prevent clotting. The correct dose for babies is only 10 units. Although the adult and infant doses were vastly different, their packaging was nearly identical.

That megadose of heparin practically turned their blood to water, Quaid said, and they began bleeding externally and internally. At one point, he says, blood from his son's umbilical cord squirted 6 feet and hit a wall. Finally, after 41 hours, the twins' blood was again clotting normally, and they made a full recovery, for which Quaid credits "a lot of praying by a lot of people." Not long afterward, he learned that other babies weren't as lucky, including three who died in Indianapolis after receiving heparin overdoses just a year before, the same mistake — "the event," as Quaid refers to it — that nearly killed his twins.

While he "reveres" health care professionals, "they're human, and humans make

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