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One hospital: Three wrong-site surgeries in four months

Federal and Massachusetts state health investigators have cited a Boston teaching hospital for making at least three surgical errors in the last four months of 2010, all of which involved surgeons operating on the wrong vertebrae during spinal surgery. Two of the surgeries were performed by the same surgeon, whose name has not been released.

The spike in spinal surgical errors at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center -- one of Harvard's teaching hospitals -- was notable, because hospitals across Massachusetts had reported only 11 similar incidents from 2006 through 2008. Officials noted that the incidents were unrelated and attributable to human error on the part of the surgeons.

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Wrong-site surgical errors are considered to be “never” events (i.e. events that should not happen if the surgeon and medical staff follow the appropriate standards of medical care). The hospital said it had procedures in place to prevent such errors, and said it could not explain how the incidents happened if those procedures were being followed.

In a recent study, U.S. researchers found that errors in judgment were involved in 85% of wrong-site surgical errors and that in 72% of the medical mistakes in the operating room, the surgical team failed to take a “time out” to assess the situation and make sure their surgical plan was correct.

In all three cases at the Beth Israel Deaconess, the doctors completed the surgery without realizing that the vertebrae they were working on was undamaged and just below or above the part of the spine that was actually injured. Two of the errors were discovered during post-surgical X-rays, when patients continued to suffer back pains, and the third was discovered in a routine postoperative X-ray.

Source: [About Lawsuits.com](http://AboutLawsuits.com)

You can view an abstract of the study in Archives of Surgery [here](#).

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