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## NY woman, university fight against medical errors

Updated 09:23 a.m., Monday, August 22, 2011

### News

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — By the time they graduate, every doctor coming out of the University at Buffalo will have gotten a lesson from [Mary Brennan-Taylor](#).

It will come from the instructor's experience of losing her mother to medical errors.

As an adjunct research instructor of family medicine, Brennan-Taylor will try to open medical students' eyes to the human cost of medical errors by telling them about the

death of her 88-year-old mother, who was hospitalized for a non-life-threatening leg ailment in 2009 and died six weeks later from hospital-acquired infections and the use of numerous medications.

"Every doctor that graduates from UB will hear Mary's story," said [David Holmes](#), associate vice chair of medical student education at the university's [Department of Family Medicine](#). "Her story adds a very human dimension to our discussion about medical errors. It helps the students realize that it's not just statistics that we are talking about. It's somebody's mom."

Brennan-Taylor is to give her second lecture to third-year medical students on Monday.

"It was a health care system failure," she said of her mother's death. "My mother was put on medications that I now know should never be given to elderly patients. It was a deadly cocktail. Then she contracted not one, not two, but three hospital-acquired infections."

Brennan-Taylor noted that 180,000 Medicare patients die as a result of medical error every year, according to government statistics.

"I felt that I would be remiss if I didn't reach out," she said.

Brennan-Taylor hopes to develop a patient safety guide for consumers. She also is working with the University at [Buffalo Patient Safety Research Center](#) on a pilot project aimed at studying adverse events to understand what went wrong and how patients and caregivers could have intervened.

In the meantime, she suggests patients take sterile wipes when going into a hospital and wiping down the bed trays, telephones and anything else they will touch. They also should insist that everyone who comes into the room wash their hands before touching them, she said.

She also said to ask questions about medications and to record treatments in a notebook.

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