



Intensive Care: Modern Safety Issues

Medicine in the last 200 years has altered dramatically

The nature of health and disease has changed irrevocably, pain has been conquered with anesthesia, and infectious diseases have been fought through a combination of drugs and better public health systems

Understanding of the pathophysiological process underpinning these changes has also improved exponentially

But, despite these advancements, our knowledge as to how health-care systems interact and influence the delivery of safe and quality care is poor. 'Medical error' as an important cause of morbidity has reached epidemic proportions

- One study has shown that between 44,000 and 98,000 patients die each year in the United States alone as a result of a clinical error
- In general, medical error is the eighth-leading cause of death. This makes it more frequent than motor vehicle accidents, breast cancer and AIDS.

Meanwhile:

- Human beings are now greater in number and older, sicker and more dependent on prophylactic and preventive therapies
- Resources are becoming scarcer and are increasingly more unevenly distributed, while diseases are becoming more global

The first step to overcoming the preventable epidemic of medical error is by the recognition of its existence. The current and vital issues needing to be addressed and understood are:

- The causes of an unsafe intensive care unit (ICU)
- Improving the safety culture and environment within ICUs

At its 22nd annual congress, the ESICM is promoting an initiative to bring together all the stakeholders who relate to our specialty in a process aimed at not only raising the profile of patient safety, but to actually improve the outcome of our patients

This process has been outlined in a document entitled 'Patient Safety in the ICU: the Vienna Declaration', which will be signed in the Austrian capital on 11 October (see separate press release). The ESICM believes the signing to be the first step in its campaign for change

More information on the society and the Vienna conference is available at www.esicm.org