



- A man who died from non-viral hepatitis of unknown origin who also had a pre-existing prostate cancer condition. The man had been taking an Indian herbal product K4. The Corner's report said despite no certainty of a link with the herbal product, the remedy such be banned until more was known about its effects on liver toxicity
- Some ongoing inquests into party pills

In contrast, deaths in 1998 (the last year of detailed official statistics available) caused by adverse reactions to pharmaceutical drugs killed 1524 New Zealanders and deaths associated with medical injury (mistakes by doctors and medical staff) killed 4222 New Zealanders.

Says Dr Bain: "A recent Australian study shows that 1 in 10 patients presenting to a general practitioner had an adverse pharmaceutical drug event in the preceding six months with 50% of those being in the moderate to severe range and 8% requiring hospitalisation.

"A New Zealand study reported in July of 2006 and referred to Parliament's Health Committee pointed to previous research suggesting problems such as hospital acquired infection, drug error and staff mistakes are costing this country around \$870 million a year. This prompted the Health Minister to ensure that District Health Boards gave priority to reducing such adverse events – most clearly identified as being drug induced."

Also in Dr Bain's report is mention of a US study that puts complications resulting from medication errors in American hospitals at \$US1.5 billion dollars per year. Studies also show that prescription drug errors double a person's risk of dying in hospital. Another study put the cost of a single adverse drug event to a hospital in the US at \$US2,500.

"The estimate of costs incurred by US hospitals as a result of drug-related injury or death was put at \$US76.6 billion which was three times the cost of all diabetes care in the United States," says Dr Bain.

"What is ironic here is that what is being held out as a justification for high regulation and compliance in the area of complementary medicines and natural products in New Zealand is public safety and risk. Despite a diligent search of Colonial records and the literature, no instances have been found to demonstrate that in fact these products have any serious public health issue or risk.

"The problem is clearly with prescription and other drugs," says Dr Bain. "The Colonial and literature searches in so far as natural products are concerned and linkages to public safety and risk can be described legally as *De minimis no curat lex*. That is – of minimal risk importance.

"The law does not and should not concern itself with such trifles."

Dr Bain's report has been sent to Annette King, Health Minister.

**Like to interview Dr Bain? Please contact Kimberley Paterson on 09**

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