



# News Notes

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**VOLUME 16 | ISSUE 4 | WINTER 2020 | RECENT EVENTS**

## **3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL DOCUMENTARY SCREENING REACTION PANEL: BLEED OUT (OCTOBER 6, 2020)**

The documentary *Bleed Out* sparked a lively discussion on the devastating effect of medical errors and what can be done to address the problem – believed to be the third leading cause of death in the U.S. The virtual panel discussion held on October 6th was held in lieu of LVBCH’s annual documentary screening and live panel discussion.

Leading the discussion was Steve Burrows, who wrote and directed the film that chronicled the botched surgery of his mother Judi Burrows and the 10-year aftermath. The film – which captures the family’s experience through cell phone footage, spy-cams and interviews – first aired on HBO in December 2018. Within the first week the film had more than 10 million views and has since surpassed 20 million. It has been screened at several state capitols and on Capitol Hill for members of Congress and their staffs.

Participating in the panel were Leah Binder, President and CEO of The Leapfrog Group; David Mayer, MD, Executive Director, MedStar Institute for Quality & Safety; and Sharon Castillo, Director, Delivery & Administration, Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Church, USA.

Binder said *Bleed Out* is a powerful film that has educated people about what can happen to a patient, family, and their care providers as the result of medical errors. Hearing such cases can be too much to absorb especially because the tragedy could have been avoided. “*Bleed Out* was like a gut punch. It was devastating.”

“*Bleed Out* captures from start to finish the toxicity in the system and what we need to fix it,” said Dr. Mayer, who described the film as, “The most powerful film that has ever been made in the patient safety space.”

Castillo recalled seeing *Bleed Out* while attending the Leapfrog annual convention. “I remember sitting in a room of 200 people or more and tears were rolling down my eyes. I thought, how can we move this forward and fix it.”

After Judi Burrows’ hip replacement surgery, she was moved to the hospital’s electronic intensive care unit (eICU), where physicians many miles away monitor patients remotely by watching camera footage projected onto a computer screen. When visiting his mother, Burrows found her unresponsive and it was later confirmed that she had been in a coma that had gone unnoticed for two days. Burrows’ uncle, a physician, reviewed the medical records and suspected a cover up so Burrows decided to document his mother’s experience for a lawsuit.

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Dr. Mayer felt the film documented medical malpractice well by showing the medical professionals had changed their stories, doctored records and lied during depositions. The first harm to Burrows family was truly unintentional. “The second harm – referred to as delay, deny and defend that goes on with the lawyers and insurance companies – is very intentional, was well coordinated, and very well resourced.”

When Dr. Mayer was at the University of Illinois, cases where the care had been substandard “were handed over to the lawyers” even though the direct care providers wanted to apologize to the families and be empathetic. Eventually the lawyers reached multimillion settlements that ended up on the front page of The Chicago Times. Only then did the health system reverse course opting to be open and honest and share details of medical error cases with families. This strategy formed the basis of the University’s Seven Pillars of Care.

About that same time a young U.S. Senator named Barack Obama was very interested in the medical error and liability crises, Dr. Mayer said. The future president believed the link was to be open, honest, and transparent and learn from mistakes. These strategies evolved into the Candor Tool kit, which calls for investigating the error the same day and talking with the patient or family to arrive at an early resolution. Every health system that had implemented the Candor Tool Kit has seen a significant reduction in serious safety events and medical malpractice costs.

Dr. Mayer said he believes the country needs to create the equivalent to the National Transportation Safety Board for health care. Pennsylvania has been a great role model in moving this forward. Also, we need to develop more incentives targeted at patient safety and quality.

Binder believes purchasers and employers have a critical role in improving employee safety and reducing medical error by holding health systems accountable for their investment in providing healthcare for employees. Not only employers, but also consumers, must require high standards to achieve a better healthcare system. “As we’ve seen with COVID, when healthcare is not working well and health is at stake, our entire country is at stake.”

Rather than surveying individual physicians, Leapfrog focuses on hospitals and healthcare systems. Consumers want to trust that the delivery system is run well and will intervene if a clinician is not performing the way they should. When an error is made, they want the health system to apologize to the patient, make amends and ensure that changes are made so it doesn’t happen to another patient. Not one clinician can do that alone. Rather, rather it requires a system of people working together. Fortunately, the Lehigh Valley has a number of very good hospitals who perform well and report out to their communities.

Castillo said the reporting of patient safety measures is very important. When people are aware of the differences in patient safety, pressure will be applied forcing poorer performing hospitals to improve.

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## ABOUT BLEED OUT:



After a routine partial hip replacement operation leaves the mother of filmmaker and comedian Steve Burrows in a coma with permanent brain damage, what starts as a personal video diary becomes a citizen’s investigation into the state of American health care. In 2009, Burrows’ mother, Judie, was rushed to the hospital for hip surgery. Bleed Out is his harrowing, eye-opening account of the 10 years that follow; an endless cycle of medical bills, emergency-room visits and insurance-company red tape. Part medical mystery and legal thriller, part investigative journey and meditation on family, this is a revealing, cautionary tale. This family’s story underscores deep flaws in America’s current healthcare system and highlights ways those problems could be fixed. Throughout, Burrows remains committed to searching for the truth about what happened with his mother’s care, exposing larger, universal issues concerning medical errors in the American healthcare system and how they are addressed.

## ABOUT STEVE BURROWS:



Steve Burrows is a comedic storyteller. This award-winning writer/director/performer has been reinventing stereotypes and challenging expectations in film, television, commercials and theatre for over two decades. His original voice - coupled with his edgy, character-driven humor - has made his work a favorite around the world, where his range in comedy is as diverse as the locations of his shoots - London, Rome, Tokyo, Bangkok, South Africa and Milwaukee, Wisconsin to name a few. Currently working on several feature film projects, including a comedy and a drama, Bleed Out is Burrows first feature documentary. He is thrilled Bleed Out has become an HBO film.

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