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Half a million patients are hit by NHS blunders

Mistakes recorded by the National Patient Safety Agency range from errors in prescriptions and operations to lost medical records and misdiagnoses and patients going 'missing' while being transferred between wards. Katherine Murphy, of the Patients' Association, said: "All those deaths were preventable. People go into hospital to get better. One can have some sympathy with staff because we know they are working under huge pressure but someone must be held accountable."

A second report reveals that more than 300 families a year sue the Health Service after errors during childbirth leave their babies brain-damaged.

Many are unable to walk, talk or feed themselves, though their intelligence may be unimpaired.

Figures from the National Health Service Litigation Authority show the bill for compensation and legal costs reached

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