

Background

- Medical malpractice is an act or omission by a health professional that digresses from standard norms and practices in the medical field, resulting in patient injury.
- About 10% of the patients around the world are affected by medical malpractice
- Incidence of medical errors varies widely from country to country. In the United States, 3% of hospitalized patients experience medical errors, and in Australia 16.5 %. In general, countries tend to underreport medical errors
- Little evidence exist about the magnitude of medical errors in Saudi Arabia
- As Saudi Arabia moves toward privatization of the health sector, it is important to assess the magnitude and distribution of medical errors in the private sector to guide policy makers in instituting control measures

Objectives

- Examine total number and trend of medical malpractice cases in private health sector in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 2011—2015
- Estimate distribution of medical malpractice cases by:
 - Health facility type (hospital versus clinic)
 - Medical specialties
 - Health professional-related characteristics, including profession, gender, and nationality
- Assess proportion of cases resulting in severe patient outcomes (death and disability)
- Estimate duration of medical litigation from initiation to issuance of final verdict

Methods

Descriptive secondary data analysis on medical practice cases reported by the Medical Jurisprudence Committee (MJC) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in the private health sector, 2011—2015

Results

- 368 medical malpractice cases reported to the MJC during 2011 — 2015
- Mean number of litigations was 73.6 cases annually
- 24.5% of the total litigations resulted in severe outcomes; 10.9% of those outcomes were disabilities and 13.6% were deaths.

Table 1. Distribution of medical malpractice cases in the private health sector in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 2011—2015

Variables	Medical Malpractice Cases (N= 368) N (%)
Year	
2011	61 (16.6)
2012	53 (14.4)
2013	79 (21.5)
2014	99 (26.9)
2015	76 (20.7)
Patient Outcome	
Death	50 (13.6)
Disability	40 (10.9)
Health Facility	
Hospital	286 (77.7)
Clinic	82 (22.3)
Verdict of accusation	
Yes	282 (76.6)
No	86 (23.4)

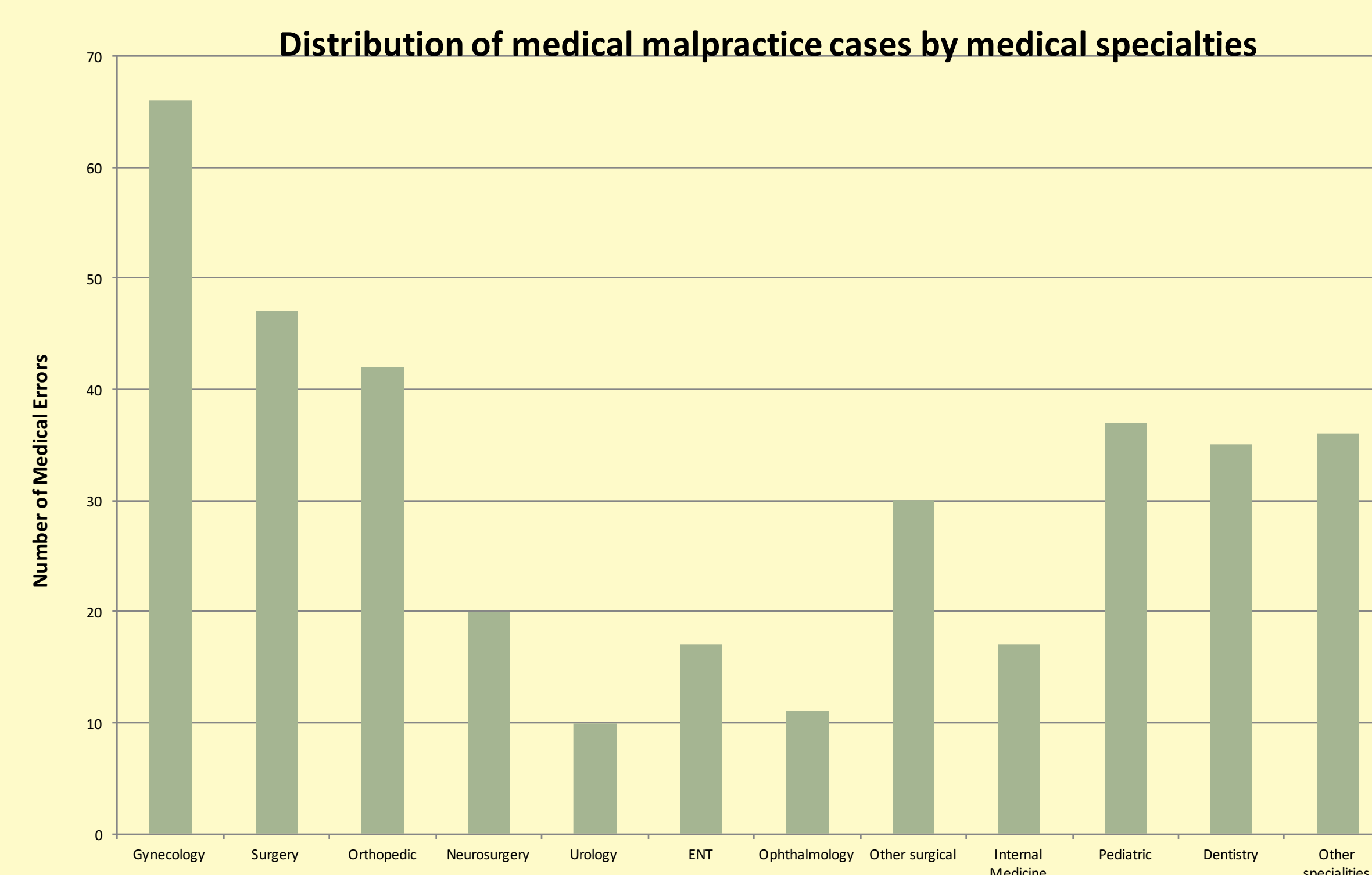


Table 2. Characteristics of involved health professionals in the private health sector in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 2011—2015

Characteristics	No. of Involved Health Professionals (N=376) N (%)
Occupations	
Physicians	349 (92.8)
Pharmacists	0 (0)
Nurses	21(5.6)
Technicians	6 (1.6)
Gender	
Male	263 (69.9)
Female	113 (30.1)
Nationality	
Saudi	45 (12)
Non-Saudi	33 (88)

Table 3. The average duration of medical lawsuit once received by the Medical Jurisprudence Committee in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 2011—2015

Medical lawsuit Process	Average number of months
First court session	5.3
Issuance of verdict	15.2

Discussions

- The trend of litigations fluctuated with the lowest number reported in 2012 (14.4%) and the highest number reported in 2014 (26.9 %)
- Obstetrics and gynecology contributed the largest number of medical errors, possibly due to to high patients volume and absence of close observation of high risk patients.
- Medical malpractices occurred least in neurosurgery, otorhinolaryngology, internal medicine, ophthalmology, and urology, possibly due to low volume of patients treated in a specialty like neurosurgery or the very limited use of invasive procedures in a specialty like internal medicine
- Most medical errors occurred in hospitals as compared to clinics due to higher use of invasive procedures that pose a higher risk for medical errors (e.g., surgical operations, emergency interventions)
- Physicians contributed more errors than other healthcare professionals, an expected finding as physicians are responsible for diagnosing and treating patients, as well as in addition to leading patient management.

Recommendations

- Data quality and access should be improved to enable a more accurate enumeration of the magnitude of medical practice
- High-risk specialties should be targeted with policies and interventions to reduce medical errors
- Continuous on-the-job training on prevention and management of medical errors should be provided to all health professionals
- The process of medical litigations should be expedited (e.g. having members of MJC be full time employees)

Conclusion

With information from this study regarding the patterns of malpractice cases by medical specialties, health facilities, health professional-related characteristics, and the duration of medical litigation, policy makers can institute appropriate control measures during Saudi Arabia's transition into privatization the health sector in order to achieve its "Vision 2030."