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Unlearned lessons

The Hospital for Sick Children got two reports in the last week.

One, the so-called "report card" on hospitals, gave Sick Kids top marks in terms of patient satisfaction with the hospital. The hospital is doing something right. The report, however, didn't deal with patient care.

The second report did. The inquest jury examining the death of Sanchia Bulgin found the hospital's care lacking in the death of the young girl.

Sanchia bled to death after surgery. The jury ruled her death accidental but it made 31 recommendations for changes. The hospital said many of them have already been implemented, including a key one to have one nurse for every three patients on the ward where Sanchia died.

"We are determined to do everything in our power to help prevent anything like this tragedy from happening again," Sick Kids' chief operating officer, Dr. Alan Goldbloom, said in response to the verdict. We have no reason to doubt his determination.

Still, the parallels remain troubling between the jury's recommendations

and those that followed another death on the same ward, that of Lisa Shore. Her mother, Sharon Shore, noted these parallels in an article in The Star.

For example, the Shore jury recommended annual education for nurses involving the assessment of vital signs. The Bulgin jury recommended that Sick Kids consider a "simulation" program to teach nurses to identify "significant changes in vital signs."

The Bulgin jury also said that the hospital's patient monitoring guidelines should emphasize "the need to fully assess the patient" rather than "assessing the monitoring equipment." Monitoring figured importantly in the Shore jury report as well.

The hospital's argument is that the two cases are not the same. And the Bulgin jury drew no direct connection between the two deaths.

But the conclusion is inescapable from a close reading of the two jury reports that all the lessons Sick Kids learned from the first death were not fully applied before the second. We trust they have been since.