

Deaths from hospital superbugs going unreported

By Melody Petersen, Los Angeles Times

Many thousands of Californians are dying every year from infections they caught while in hospitals. But you'd never know that from their death certificates.

Sharley McMullen of Manhattan Beach came down with a fever just hours after being wheeled out of a Torrance Memorial Medical Center operating room on May 4, 2014. A missionary's daughter who worked as a secretary at Cape Canaveral, Fla., at the height of the space race, McMullen, 72, was there for treatment of a bleeding stomach ulcer. Soon, though, she was fighting for her life.

On her medical chart, a doctor scribbled "CRKP," an ominous abbreviation for one of the world's most lethal superbugs, underlining it three times.

Doctors tried antibiotic after antibiotic. But after five weeks in the hospital, mostly in intensive care and on morphine because of the pain, McMullen died.

Her death certificate does not mention the hospital-acquired infection or CRKP, however. Instead, her doctor wrote that McMullen had died from respiratory failure and septic shock caused by her ulcer.

An epidemic of hospital-acquired infections is going unreported, scientists have found.

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