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## Italy's NHS 'kills 50,000 a year'

John Hooper in Rome  
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[The Guardian](#)

Italian opposition politicians yesterday demanded a full inquiry into claims that up to 50,000 people a year die in Italy's hospitals because of medical error.

A report presented to a congress organised by the Italian Association of Medical Oncology concluded that even the most conservative estimate pointed to a figure of 14,000 deaths a year, which is twice the death toll on Italy's roads.

The association's broad definition of medical error took in not only malpractice, but also flaws in the health system such as lengthy waiting lists that led to patients being diagnosed too late to effect a cure.

The president of the doctors' professional body, Amedeo Bianco, warned: "I am not disputing the seriousness of the study. But I know how difficult it is to gather data of this sort and [this] lends itself to wide margins of error."

**Maurizio Maggiorotti**, who heads an association representing doctors accused of malpractice, said he would sue the authors of the report under a law that forbids causing public alarm. A spokesman for Italy's orthopaedic and traumatological specialists said patients would be "terrorised" by the figures.

But the opposition's leading parliamentary health spokesperson said in a joint statement: "We cannot just stand by when faced with such alarming news."

Italy's health minister, Livia Turno, said: "Whatever the right number we have a duty to tackle the problem decisively."