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HB 84 – Hospitals and Urgent Care Centers- Sepsis (Laughlin’s Law)

Three Days before his fifth birthday, Laughlin DeSantis was very sick. His parents, Brooke and Bill, took Laughlin to an urgent care center where the staff told Brooke and Bill that Laughlin had the flu. Laughlin was given Tamiflu and sent home. Later that night, as Laughlin’s symptoms grew more dire, they took him to the ER where he died of sepsis a few hours later. As I said, three days before his 5th birthday.

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Sepsis is a potentially life-threatening condition that occurs when the body's response to infection causes widespread inflammation throughout the body. It can lead to a cascade of changes that damage multiple organ systems, ultimately resulting in organ failure and death if not treated promptly.

Early recognition and prompt treatment of sepsis are crucial for a positive outcome. Treatment typically involves antibiotics to target the underlying infection, along with supportive care to stabilize vital signs and address organ dysfunction. In severe cases, such as Laughlin’s, patients are admitted to an intensive care unit for close monitoring and advanced interventions.

Sepsis can affect individuals of any age, but it is more common and more dangerous in older adults—individuals with weakened immune systems and those with chronic medical conditions. It is critically important to seek medical attention immediately if symptoms of infection or sepsis are suspected, as early intervention can significantly improve the chances of survival and recovery.

Each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least 1.7 million adults in the U.S. develop sepsis, and nearly

270,000 die as a result. On average, about 30 percent of those who develop severe sepsis or septic shock will die--this condition claims about 1,100 lives in Maryland each year. By comparison, an average of 800 Marylanders died from gun violence and 600 Marylanders die on our roadways. Far more attention is given to both of those public health concerns. Sepsis is a quiet killer—but no less lethal or devastating to families like Laughlin's.

Sepsis is a major public health concern. Improving awareness, early detection, and treatment protocols for the infection –its symptoms and its rapid progression--can reduce the mortality associated with this condition.

A case study of Frederick Health Hospital (FHH) done 11 years ago found that the leading cause of death at FHH was sepsis, with mortality rates as high as 16 percent. The hospital did not have bundles or protocols in place to treat sepsis patients, nor did they have a system to recognize borderline sepsis patients. The hospital's Performance Improvement Department formed a multidisciplinary Sepsis Steering Committee to track cases and find a solution.

Without going into detail, I'll just point out that the 16% mortality dropped to 4%.

Survival rates for sepsis can vary widely based on several factors, including, the individual patient's overall health, the severity of the infection, the speed with which treatment is initiated, and the effectiveness of medical interventions. Early recognition and prompt treatment are critical factors that can significantly improve the chances of survival and recovery.

While sepsis can be a life-threatening condition, many people do survive with timely and appropriate medical care. The mortality rate for sepsis has decreased in recent years due to improved awareness, early intervention protocols, and advancements in medical treatments.

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The Surviving Sepsis Campaign, an international initiative focused on improving the management and outcomes of sepsis, provides guidelines for healthcare professionals to optimize care and reduce mortality rates. These guidelines emphasize early recognition, administration of antibiotics, fluid resuscitation and supportive care. Some individuals may experience long-term effects even after surviving the acute phase of the illness. Recovery

may involve rehabilitation and ongoing medical follow-up. In the final analysis, Sepsis calls for immediate medical attention even if it is just suspected. The survival and recovery of patients depends on accurate and vigilant diagnosis of Sepsis.