Mining Data for Better Medicine

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**Mining Data for Better Medicine**
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Researchers are utilizing digital medical records to conduct wide-ranging studies on the effects of certain drugs and how they relate to different populations. Data-mining studies also are being used to uncover evidence of economic problems, such as overbilling and unnecessary procedures. In addition, some large hospital systems are employing full-time database research teams to study electronic records. Stanford University researcher Russ Altman is developing tools to analyze the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Adverse Event Reporting System, a database containing several million reports of drugs that have harmed patients. The Stanford researchers have developed an algorithm that searched for patients taking widely prescribed drugs who subsequently suffered side effects similar to those seen in diabetics. "There's just an incredibly wide range of possibilities for research from using all this aggregated data," says Margaret Anderson, executive director of FasterCures, a think tank in Washington, D.C. "We're asking, 'Why aren't we paying a little bit more attention to that?'"