

Establishing a Culture of Safety

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ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF SAFETY

By Mary Pat Aust, RN, MSN

Patient safety has taken an increasingly prominent place in the acute and critical care environments in the past 10 years, culminating in efforts to establish a culture of safety in every facility. In 2002, The Joint Commission announced the first set of National Patient Safety Goals that required each organization to review policies, procedures, and processes embedded within the culture to ensure compliance with the goals. Today, quality improvement efforts permeate individual critical care and acute care units. Patient safety experts emphasize that improved patient outcomes can only be sustained if a culture of safety is present throughout all levels of a health care organization.

Chaboyer and colleagues examined attitudes about safety among various disciplines in Australian intensive care units. There were variations in the responses among bedside nurses, nurse leaders, and physicians, but all the responding units indicated that the key areas needing improvement were communication and teamwork, staffing, education and training, and physical resources. The results from this study are similar to studies conducted in health care organizations in the United States.

Here's what you can do:

- Seek information from unit leadership or its quality council and understand your unit's and organization's status regarding established quality improvement goals.
- Reflect on your individual practice related to patient safety (eg, How often do you comply with the national patient safety goals for patient identification? Do you perform a time out for all invasive procedures? How often do you perform hand hygiene when entering and leaving a patient's room?).
- Share your observations with peers, other members of the multidisciplinary team, unit, and hospital management through participation on the unit's or hospital's quality or self-governance council.



Illustration by Birck Cox

Other helpful resources:

- TeamSteps: <http://teamstepps.ahrq.gov>.
- Comprehensive Unit-Based Safety Program (CUSP): <http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/cusp.htm>.
- Center for Innovation in Quality Patient Care: http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/innovation_quality_patient_care.
- Improving Patient and Worker Safety—Opportunities for Synergy, Collaboration and Innovation: http://www.jointcommission.org/improving_Patient_Worker_Safety.
- The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, <http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au>.

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