



Patient Safety Awareness Week



Shining a light on a public health crisis

Each year, an important event is nationally recognized but frequently overshadowed by our busy lives: Patient Safety Awareness Week. Seven days are devoted to increase awareness about patient safety in the eyes of all healthcare professionals and the public. This year, patient safety week is March 11-17, 2018, and its importance is critical when you consider that preventable harm in healthcare is a public health crisis; estimates place it as a leading cause of death in the United States.

I'm amazed that so much hard work—by organizations such as the National Patient Safety Foundation—takes place months ahead of time to develop strategies to highlight the week's importance. After all, why isn't patient safety at the top of our minds all the time, just like the weather or our favorite topic on Facebook? Why do we need a special week to blow the whistle on the fact that more than 1,000 preventable deaths a day is too many?

Maybe it's because as a system we haven't taken full responsibility for the level of harm and our part in causing it. Although patients and families play a critical role in preventing medical errors and reducing harm, the responsibility for safe, effective care lies primarily with the leaders of all types of healthcare organizations and the physicians, clinicians, and staff who deliver the care. Many of the barriers to safe practice, such as lack of access to health records and few easy-to-understand tools and checklists for self-care, are the responsibility of the healthcare system.

Here's one example: Helping patients and families become more confident and effective in their interactions with all of us who serve as their healthcare providers enhances safe care. Many tools already exist, but the system must train professionals to use them and provide the time to educate patients to become effective partners. But what's usually the first item cut during budget reductions? You know the answer: education and training expenses. Add to that sad reality trying to deliver patient-centered care in our productivity-driven system. Just how much can we actually educate a patient in a 5- to 10-minute interaction?

So yes, we need a Patient Safety Awareness Week



every year to shine a laser beam on this real problem. Yes, I'll settle for the focus during just 1 week out of 52. But I ask you, shouldn't we strive to make every day patient safety day?

I encourage all nurses and nursing leaders to partner with their patients and families to develop the best, safest, and most compassionate care possible, and to acknowledge that when we fail to deliver on that goal, we're responsible for both the result and the solution. We're the most trusted profession. We have the knowledge, skills, and experience to transform a broken system. And just as important, we have a vision of a better healthcare world and the creativity to get us there. But do we have the will? Do we have the collective desire to shun mediocrity and demand better? The nation will pause for a week in the month of March to think about that very issue. Better care at lower costs. We all deserve nothing less.

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