

PATIENT SAFETY: ACHIEVING A NEW STANDARD FOR CARE

Every day, tens if not hundreds of thousands of errors occur in the health care system. Some can cause disastrous effects, while others—the “near misses”—slip by almost unnoticed. In recent years, patient safety reporting systems have proliferated in health care, and many hospitals now routinely capture information on “near misses” as well as disasters. However, the utility of these reporting systems is limited. The data they collect is neither complete nor standardized, and reporting is cumbersome, costly, and sporadic at best.

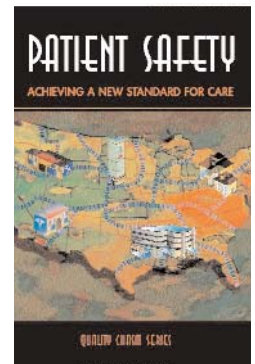
Improving patient safety will require much more than information systems, even if they are comprehensive and well functioning, for reporting and analyzing errors. An enhanced care delivery system must be built, one that can prevent errors from occurring in the first place. To do this, the health care industry must simultaneously set up an easy and streamlined way for health care professionals to acquire and share information related to error prevention and quality improvement.

Building on the revolutionary Institute of Medicine reports *To Err is Human* and *Crossing the Quality Chasm*, *Patient Safety: Achieving a New Standard for Care* puts forward a road map for the development and adoption of key health care data standards to support both information exchange and the reporting and analysis of patient safety data.

One of the most important messages of the report is the need for a much broader approach to patient safety that was first stated in *To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System*. Patient safety is defined as the prevention of harm to patients, where harm can occur through errors of commission and omission. Safety and quality cannot be separated. Achieving patient safety as a standard for care requires a commitment by all stakeholders to a culture of safety and improved information systems.

A second critical message is that access to and use of clinical data at the point of care is necessary to prevent, recognize and recover from events. The data also are essential to better understand the nature of patient safety events, how they occur, and how they can be prevented in the future. The ability to access useful data is directly dependent on a sound information infrastructure and data standards for representing the information.

To ensure that Americans receive safe care, the authoring committee addresses the need for a standards-based national health information infrastructure to support comprehensive patient safety programs for adverse event and near miss detection and analysis. The report makes detailed recommendations on the data



standards needed for this new information infrastructure including standards for data interchange, health care terminologies, knowledge representation, and a common format for reporting of data related to medical errors.

This report will be of interest to individuals and organizations with an interest in patient safety, quality improvement, and the use of information technology in healthcare.

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Patient Safety: Achieving a New Standard for Care is available for sale from the National Academies Press, 500 Fifth St. NW, Washington, DC 20001; call (800) 624-6242 or (202) 334-3313 (in the Washington metropolitan area), or visit the NAP's on-line bookstore at www.nap.edu. For more information about the Institute of Medicine, visit the IOM home page at www.iom.edu. © 2004 by the National Academy of Sciences. Permission is granted to reproduce this report brief in its entirety, with no additions or alterations.