



The Future of Healthcare Safety

The Joint Commission defines safety culture as the product of individual and group beliefs, values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies, and patterns of behavior that determine the organization's commitment to quality and patient safety. That is a lot to coordinate and get right for any given organization and far more complex when considering the larger healthcare system in which these organizations operate. However, it is a vision worth striving for and more important now than ever.

This April, the Patient Safety Movement Foundation conducted a survey to learn more about public views of patient safety. An astonishing 70% of respondents had never heard anything about medical errors in their community. In the United States, medical error is the third leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer. It is beyond belief that so many people are completely unaware such a significant issue. The future of safety I envision is one in which patients are aware, educated, and empowered.

The patient is the one person payors, providers, and pharma all serve. As the industry continues to move to value-based models focused on quality-driven outcomes, I am hopeful that the future of patient safety will be more patient-centric. As a public health professional currently working in community engagement, I envision a future where more patient and family voices are actively sought and included in discussions of safety. Establish patient and family advisory councils. Implement evidence-based strategies to promote shared decision making. Consider patient safety across the entire continuum of care and build on current care coordination efforts. Think of other areas in which patients need support.

I have attended innumerable patient safety talks that focus on checklists, information-sharing across organizations, gaining leadership support, outcomes and metrics, and specific processes / initiatives. I have attended just as many patient engagement talks that discuss the types of patient-centric strategies I outlined above. The future of healthcare safety I envision is one in which we are having just as many sessions about patient engagement as a patient safety strategy.

I have attended and loved the last few Patient Safety Summits. I am grateful to the DFW Hospital Council for coordinating all these stakeholders to discuss critical patient safety topics. The powerful keynote address on human trafficking last year was a beautiful example of the type of holistic patient-centric safety efforts I would like to see more often. I am writing this essay to request / encourage the continued expansion of patient safety discussions to more intentionally include additional people and perspectives in the conversation. I truly believe this will lead to a brighter – and safer – future for us all.