



MASSACHUSETTS HOSPITALS LEAD PATIENT SAFETY EFFORTS

Organization that certifies hospitals now expects other states to follow

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Prevention of Medical Errors and the Massachusetts Hospital Association celebrated a major endorsement of their two leading patient safety initiatives today. The initiatives are designed to reduce medication errors and ensure that a patient's test results are properly communicated to caregivers. The Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), the national group that certifies hospitals, now expects hospitals around the country to follow Massachusetts' lead in adopting these priorities.

The JCAHO's 2005 National Patient Safety Goals (NPSGs), which were released today, include new standards for the two patient safety topics which are the focus of the Massachusetts initiative. Under the joint aegis of the MHA and the Massachusetts Coalition for the Prevention of Medical Errors, Massachusetts was the first state to develop and promote statewide implementation of safe practices for these priorities.

"We are proud that Massachusetts serves as a model on these two patient safety fronts," noted Mount Auburn Hospital President and CEO Jeanette Clough, the chairwoman of the MHA's Board of Trustees, and treasurer of the Coalition. "Safety is a primary responsibility of hospitals, and we are always looking for ways to innovate and stay in the forefront – for the benefit of our patients. Patients across the country are the winners here," Clough said.

JCAHO's new recommendations carry significant weight in the hospital community. They will form an important part of the standards that will be used in assigning hospital accreditation.

In consultation with caregivers from a variety of medical disciplines, the Coalition and MHA have helped hospitals in Massachusetts implement these centerpiece safe practices. MHA encouraged hospitals to enlist in the initiatives and adopt the recommended practices. For its part, the Coalition has provided model policies and forms, which have been widely distributed to

hospitals. Together, they convened participating hospitals regularly to hear from experts and share strategies and tactics. The Coalition also provides tips and tools that hospitals can access via the Web at www.macoalition.org.

The hospitals are tracking performance to ensure that their efforts are producing better outcomes for patients. The entire effort has been supported in part by a three-year grant from the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Each of the initiatives is supported by its own “collaborative” of medical professionals.

The Massachusetts Reconciling Medications Collaborative seeks to promote better coordination of medication orders. It ensures that all appropriate medications are prescribed during admission to a hospital, and that the medications a patient is taking at home are accounted for.

Dr. Eric Alper, the patient safety officer at UMass Memorial Medical Center, said the collaborative group that focuses on reducing medication errors took some basic steps that have produced big benefits. “We produced a form, for example. The form provides one record where all providers can document the patient’s current medications. It also allows providers to order medications. After testing and improving it, this one simple form has helped us dramatically reduce our hospital’s medication error rates.”

Delays in communicating test results that indicate life-threatening conditions are widely recognized as a serious problem, especially when multiple caregivers are involved in the patient’s care or when a patient has been transferred. The Critical Test Results Collaborative promotes strategies for timely and reliable communication of critical test results to the clinician, who can then take action. The project covers laboratory, radiology, cardiology and other diagnostic tests in both inpatient and outpatient settings.

“It’s exciting to see what is possible through this statewide collaboration to change our hospital systems,” said the initiative’s scientific advisor, Dr. Lucian Leape of the Harvard School of Public Health, who also praised the hospitals.

This is not the first time that Massachusetts has led the way in setting patient safety goals. Other practices developed by MHA and the Coalition for reducing medication errors were incorporated into goals adopted by the JCAHO two years ago.

About the Coalition: The Massachusetts Coalition for the Prevention of Medical Errors was initiated in 1997 as a statewide collaborative effort to improve patient safety and minimize medical errors in Massachusetts. The Coalition has been in the forefront of national activities to promote a systems-oriented approach to improving patient safety, creating mechanisms to identify causes of medical errors, and developing and disseminating strategies for prevention. Members include consumer organizations, professional associations for physicians, nurses, hospitals, and other health care professionals, state and federal health agencies, policymakers, health plans, and employers. The Coalition recently won national recognition for its safety agenda, including its work to reduce medication errors throughout the state, when the Institute for Safe Medication Practices, a Pennsylvania based non-profit organization that works nationally to promote medication safety efforts, presented one of its annual “CHEERS” awards to the Coalition in December, 2003.

About MHA: Through education, advocacy and research, the Massachusetts Hospital Association supports its member hospitals in their missions of providing compassionate, accessible, high-quality care. The MHA was founded in 1936.