

Patient Empowerment: A Mean of Improving The Culture of Safety Within Hospitals



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It's easy to think of hospitals as naturally safe places, but it can be filled with lurking dangers due to potential infections and medical errors. However, one way to prevent preventable harm and have a 'just culture' is to engage and empower patients and help them understand their role in the healthcare team/system

By engaging and empowering patients, the potential for infections and medical errors will decrease. This can be done by offering patients the right to be fully informed about their treatment plan and consent to treatment. By providing them information about their health condition, involving them in their health-related decision-making, enabling them to take responsibility for their health and actively seek care when necessary, and empowering them to converse and ask questions.^{1,2,3}

Patient's Role in Preventing Errors & Improving the Culture of Safety

While many patient safety interventions have used various approaches to effecting change, such as changing provider behaviour, encouraging interprofessional collaboration, and enhancing safety culture, the patient's role in safety has not been overlooked.

Efforts to empower and engage patients to promote patient safety culture have focused on three main areas: enlisting patients in detecting adverse events, empowering patients to ensure safe care, and emphasizing patient involvement to improve the culture of safety within hospitals.⁴

Patient Empowerment in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, the concept of Patient Empowerment has started to build, spread, improve and gain more attention from several regulators and governmental entities.^{3,5}

Moreover, the Jeddah Declaration declared in 2019 at the 4th Global Ministerial Patient Safety Summit held in Jeddah hosted by Kingdom of Saudi Arabia outlined a set of recommendations for international standards, guidelines, and actions to address patient safety issues of global significance.

One of the Jeddah Declaration's recommendations is to **"Promote Patient Empowerment & Community Engagement for Patient Safety"** to encourage countries to adopt practical empowerment strategies for patients and families. For example, strategies highlighted co-production principles by strengthening health literacy and endorsing implementation and reinforcing Patient-Centred Root Cause Analysis (Patient - Centered RCA).⁶

This recommendation shows how essential and significant patient empowerment is to achieve a culture of safety

We can achieve that by:

- Providing an enabling and supportive environment by encouraging and facilitating interactions among health care professionals.
- Engagement with patients and families.
- Promoting open disclosure about safety incidents to patients.
- Linking patient feedback systems to organizational systems for learning and improvement is similar to the staff-initiated incident reports.
- Providing information and support for self-care, such as counselling.
- Establishing Peer- support groups and coaching.

- Designating and supporting patient safety champions or advocates where appropriate to help facilitate patient engagement.
- Setting up mechanisms for patient engagement at the systems level.⁷

Finally, hospitals are increasingly recognizing the crucial role of patients' perspectives in establishing a safety culture. Many institutions have prioritized engaging patient representatives in designing and nurturing safety efforts and emphasizing transparency in reporting errors and care problems. Patients' active engagement in safety efforts has extended to allowing patients and families to summon rapid response teams, rather than waiting for clinicians to respond.⁴

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