



# FIRST, DO NO HARM

## Three Steps to Improving Patient Safety

A study from the Institute of Medicine estimated that 98,000 Americans die every year due to preventable medical errors – more than car accidents, breast cancer, or gun violence – making it the third leading cause of death in the U.S.

**Although most reputable health care organizations have adopted organization-wide systems and practices to improve patient safety, the personality and behaviors of individual caregivers are often overlooked. Following are three steps to help health care providers improve patient safety.**

## **1. START WITH STAFF**

Every employee, from hospital administrators to doctors and nurses to orderlies and janitorial staff, plays a vital role in improving patient safety. However, in a 2013 report from insurance provider **AIG**, 52% of C-suite executives and 51% of hospital risk managers said that nursing and clinical staff bear the brunt of responsibility for patient safety.

Obviously, medical personnel should have the proper training and technical skills to perform their jobs. But should that be the only criteria? Nursing and clinical staff face demanding work environments:

- **Long hours** – According to an article in the *American Journal of Nursing*, the likelihood of making an error was three times higher when nurses worked 12.5 hours or longer.
- **Heavy patient loads** – In the AIG survey, 40% of hospital administrators said their inpatient load exceeded safe levels at least once a month, and 36% reported having an unsafe workload at least weekly.
- **High turnover** – According to a report by hospital staffing agency **Nursing Solutions, Inc.**, the average turnover among medical staff is currently 14.7%, up from 13.5% in 2012.

When it comes to performing in such a high-stakes atmosphere, all applicants are not created equal. **Our research** shows that there are six personality-based competencies that accurately predict an individual's ability to perform his or her job safely:

- **Compliant** – High scorers conform to organizational guidelines and are less likely to ignore rules.
- **Strong** – High scorers exhibit confidence in their work and are less likely to make mistakes by panicking under pressure.
- **Cheerful** – High scorers display emotional control while working and are less likely to make mistakes by losing their temper.
- **Vigilant** – High scorers remain attentive during repetitive tasks and are less likely to make mistakes because of boredom.
- **Cautious** – High scorers perform work carefully and avoid unnecessary risk.
- **Trainable** – High scorers are open to new training and development and are less likely to overestimate their own competence.

## 2. CHANGE THE CULTURE

According to AIG's survey, negative organizational culture is the number one barrier to patient safety. In fact, one third of the C-suite respondents said their hospital needed to undergo major cultural changes in order to maintain a culture of patient safety. Organizational culture impacts patient safety in three main ways:

**Staff Buy-In** – Nurses and clinical staff bear the greatest responsibility for patient safety, and as such are the most familiar with the countless risks patients face. The constantly evolving nature of safety best practices makes it necessary to continually institute new procedures. However, top-down patient safety initiatives aren't likely to be well received.

“Simply announcing new initiatives will be met with resistance,” said Ryan Ross, Hogan's VP of Global Alliances. “It needs to be a two-way conversation to ensure understanding and gain commitment.”

**Communication Breakdown** – According to the AIG study, three quarters of risk managers listed lack of staff communication and teamwork as their top barrier to maintaining patient safety, as did 68% of hospital executives. That issue becomes compounded every time a patient has to be moved or transferred between departments (e.g., from surgery to recovery).

“This is all about communication,” says Ross. “After a long shift, do nurses see it as ‘my job is over, time to go home,’ or do they say ‘I really need to transition and follow the proper steps to make sure the patient is as safe as possible’?”

**Compliance vs. Commitment** – What happens when a mistake is made? According to a report from the [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#), 54% of hospital workers said that when an accident was reported, management was more interested in disciplining the responsible employee than correcting the problem.

“This is as much about leadership as it is about safety,” Ross said. “Are you after compliance, or are you after commitment? The research out there is pretty clear that a compliance culture breeds more problems. You can have a much higher performing, higher functioning team environment if everyone is committed to the same goals.”



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### **3. SEND A MESSAGE: PEOPLE OVER PROFITS**

Creating and maintaining a successful safety culture requires leaders to understand and manage employees' perceptions at all levels of their organizations, starting at the top.

According to AIG, only 2% of C-suite executives consider maximizing financial sustainability as their highest priority, a sharp contrast to the 64% who said maximizing patient safety. However, the same group said 16% of their time was devoted to maximizing financial sustainability, and only 33% of their time was devoted to patient safety efforts.

The disconnect between what hospital administrators say and what they do communicates to hospital staff that although patient safety is important, it's not as important as financial sustainability. To be fair, financial sustainability is important to maintaining quality patient care. If a medical institution can't pay its staff competitively, keep its facilities up to date, and continually upgrade its equipment, it is unlikely it could maintain patient safety. Indeed, 72% of C-suite executives named maximizing financial sustainability as a primary challenge to maximizing patient safety.

However, these goals aren't mutually exclusive.

"Considering nearly half of every dollar spent on healthcare costs is related to a medical error, improvements in patient safety will provide a quick return on investment," said Emily Rinehart, a registered nurse and vice president and division manager for healthcare risk consulting at AIG.





## HOGAN'S APPROACH

Based on more than 30 years of research and innovation, Hogan SafeSystem consists of three components that help healthcare providers hire safer workers, create a culture of patient safety, and improve the quality of patient care.

1. **The SafeSystem Climate Survey** provides critical feedback regarding the existing perceptions of safety at all levels in the organization via a companywide safety score.
2. **The Hogan Safety Assessment** assesses individuals along six safety-related personality competencies and provides valuable information for hiring and developing candidates.
3. **The SafeSystem Coaching Process** is designed to accurately identify and teach safe tendencies within an organizational context, providing leadership with the necessary feedback to build and maintain a culture of safe working practices.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

According to recent studies, preventable medical errors are the number three cause of death in the U.S. – more than car accidents, breast cancer, or AIDS. Improving patient safety is critical to restoring people's trust in their physicians and ensuring the economic sustainability of hospitals across the country.

Using Hogan SafeSystem, healthcare providers can assess and correct existing perceptions of safety across organizational levels, evaluate the safety potential of its employees and job candidates, teach safe tendencies within an organizational context, and provide organizational leadership with the necessary feedback to build and maintain a culture of safe working practices.

*Hogan Assessment Systems is a global personality assessment provider that helps companies select employees, develop leaders, and identify talent. Hogan specializes in identifying high potential candidates for targeted positions, providing leadership development tools to help emerging leaders realize their full potential, and determining relationships between individual personality characteristics and safety performance. Hogan's assessments can be administered in over 40 languages and are available on a state-of-the-art platform, giving customers accurate feedback within seconds of completion.*