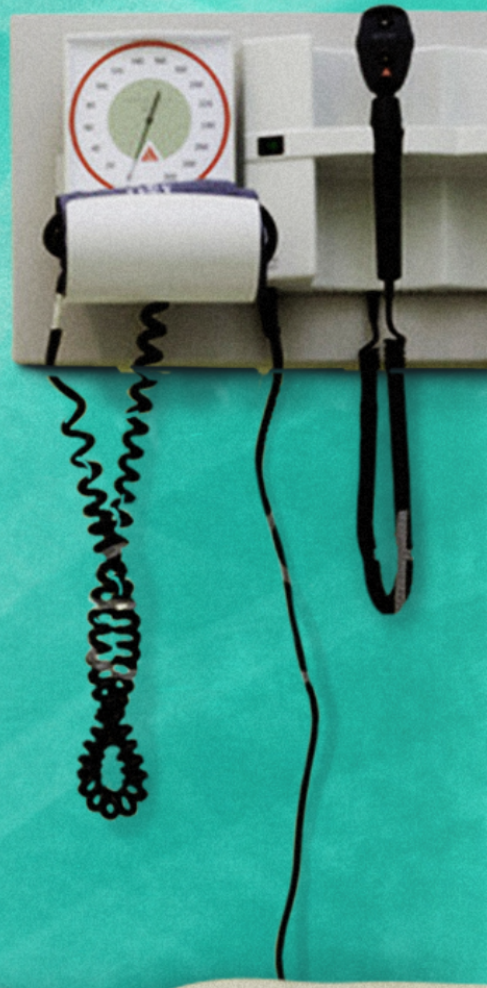
#FORTHEPATIENTS

WHAT IS PATIENT SAFETY?



FOR THE PATIENTS

Patient Safety

is the practice of reducing and preventing unnecessary harm in health care.

If this is the first time you've heard of patient safety it may be because there's a lack of public information about it, that patient rights and education haven't been prioritized or that hospitals under-report incidences of medical errors. It may be that politicians haven't paid enough attention to the gaps in health care oversight or allowed too many loopholes in hospital regulation.

But patient safety should always come first. Our doctors, regulators and politicians all have a responsibility to prioritize safety. And, as patients, we can contribute by understanding our rights, being active in our own health care and advocating for improved patient safety.

FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN YOUR HEALTHCARE

There is no Federal Bill of Patient Rights.

Think that's a problem? So do we. Ask your U.S. Representative and Senators what they're doing about that.

Find out if your state has a medical error reporting program.

And ask how it is enforced. If it does not, write to your state legislators about it.

Learn about your state medical board.

This is the entity that is responsible for licensing and disciplining doctors practicing in your state.

Know Your Patient Rights

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT.

To a patient advocate.

To request a translator if you have trouble understanding your doctor.

To informed consent, a dialogue with your provider about your healthcare options.

To be treated with respect, no matter your background or race.

To your complete medical records.

Who is In Charge?

A few different entities are responsible for overseeing patient safety. Unlike the Federal Aviation Agency or Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which are responsible for ensuring consumer safety, there's no independent centralized authority for patient safety. Why would we expect any less of the system that is meant to care for us at our most vulnerable?

Congress established **The National Practitioner Data Bank (NPDB)** in 1986 to increase patient safety by keeping records of physician conduct and outcomes. Hospitals, state licensing boards and other health care entities are required to report certain adverse disciplinary actions taken against individual doctors. Due to special interest lobbying and a lack of consumer-facing legislation, patients are blocked from accessing essential information about their healthcare providers.

State Medical Boards are responsible for licensing, disciplining, and regulating physicians. State laws require boards to discipline licensees who've endangered or injured patients, but the rates of action taken are low. Boards are typically made up of political appointees affiliated with the health sector who may be less inclined to discipline a peer.

Hospitals and state medical boards often don't submit or access essential medical information from the NPDB, meaning some doctors continue to practice even after injuring patients.

WHEN IS PATIENT SAFETY AN ISSUE?

Nurses and doctors are trained and dedicated professionals committed to our care. But mistakes do occur. And the risk of negative outcomes increases when hospitals don't follow proper safety protocols, when they don't report negative outcomes, or when staff are overworked and tired.

Studies show BIPOC, disabled patients, limited English speakers, and women also have an increased risk of harm.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Tell the U.S. Congress that patient safety should be a priority.

Search for your congressional district members' contact information and email, call, visit, or write a letter telling them to amend the Health Care Quality Improvement Act of 1986 to make the NPDB open to the public. You want access to information!

Ask your state legislators to increase oversight and transparency of state medical boards and to include patients as members so they have a voice at the table.

Learn About Health Equity.

The American Public Health Association shares resources to help you better understand health equity issues – and why they matter.

Stay up to date.

The medical and political systems could do more to ensure equitable and safe health care. There are advocates, like Public Citizen, Patient Safety Movement Foundation and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Health Equity Empowerment program working to change that. Find out how your State Health Association is addressing equity needs. Follow @propublica, @NAACP and @plan4zero on social media and visit citizen.org/patientsafety to learn about real-time actions you can take and share with others.

LEARN MORE BY VISITING

- www.patientsafety.citizen.org
- www.littleton-roadph.com/forthepatients
- www.patientsafetymovement.org

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