



POLICYMEDICAL™ ARTICLE

# Patient Safety Champions

How to discover the inner patient safety champion

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## The importance of patient safety champions



It is becoming more apparent that **champions** are central to the success of patient safety practices shift and the movement of the safety culture.

A reading that supplements this thought on **patient safety champions** is from *Healthcare Quarterly* 12 (Sp) 2009:123-128 by *Soo et al* (University of Toronto), titled “Role of Champions in the Implementation of Patient Safety Practice Change”, which I would recommend.

In this article, the authors explain that the clinical champion role is a concept that has been “widely promoted yet underdeveloped in health services literature”. Their study suggests we take a systematic and evidence-based approach to identifying, understanding and supporting champions.

The *IOM (Institute of Medicine)* report “To Err is Human” (1999) stated that the presence of champions was one of the factors that helped anesthesiology become one of the safest sectors of medicine, and recommended clinician leadership and advocacy as a way to establish a system-wide culture of safety in healthcare overall.

### Who do we see in the champion role?

Depending on the organization, I have seen executive champions everywhere, from senior leadership positions, to managers of units, to the front line staff. With certainty, I can say that the possibility to become a patient safety champion is inherent in each and every role within healthcare.

So how can we engage those who are interested in patient safety initiatives to become a champion?



## #1 Education

It is imperative that the potential champion understands safety initiatives on a deeper level. A patient safety champion needs to be able to identify the activities that a hospital can do to improve patient safety, and also understand how it improves patient safety. They will need to speak and live their passion for patient safety so that they can influence others around them to buy into the initiative.



## #2 Help them build relationships

The champion needs to go throughout the organization to influence the change and build relationships with those adopting the initiative and to help them spread the change. *Soo et al* explain that having the champion build relationships was a big win. A staff that recognizes the champion as a team player

and an integral part of the team that was in touch with their day-to-day conflicts is one that is susceptible to incorporating advice about patient safety from someone else.



### #3 Tap into their leadership qualities and passion

Is the champion a leader in the sense that they have demonstrated skills that will be needed to move the initiative along? For example, you cannot have a passionate patient safety champion tasked to speak at staff meetings if they have no experience or skills for doing so. However, if the individuals that are identified receive coaching and assistance to hone in on these skills, ideas of patient safety will spread much more quickly.



### #4 Give them time

*Soo et al* uncovered preliminary findings about patient safety champions – one is that all champions require protected time to focus on the initiatives they are implementing.

*Kaiser Health News Column* recently posted an article titled “Ten Years Later: Look to Nurses as Champions of Patient Safety” (Naylor and Pauly, December 10, 2009) which mentions that the IOM report cast a spotlight on the role of nurses in keeping patients safe. We know that nurses are playing a central role in offering solutions that correct gaps in process and advance patient safety and quality.

They also state that even today, only 2% of hospital boards – where decisions about safety and quality are made – have nurses sitting on them. We need to tap into their expertise and look at how we can empower the nurses that have patient safety champion potential to make a difference.

Nurses and other clinicians must be supported as champions in patient safety initiatives such as reducing blood stream infections, medication errors and fall prevention.

Any champion should be educated and encouraged to fight the cause they are charged with spreading safety throughout an organization. Healthcare workers never enter this field with the intent to do harm to patients, so knowing that there is a foundation of compassion already rooted within them will make it easy to take the next step to engage them as patient safety champions!



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