
Backgrounder

Introduction

Patient safety, defined as the reduction and mitigation of unsafe acts within the health care system, as well as through the use of best practices shown to lead to optimal patient outcomes, is a critical aspect of quality health care.

Educating health care providers about patient safety and enabling them to use the tools and knowledge to build and maintain a safe system is regarded as critical to CPSI's vision to create one of the safest health systems in the world. With no widely accepted approach available to incorporate patient safety practices into the education of health professionals in Canada, CPSI identified the need for a comprehensive, inter-professional patient safety framework for education and professional development purposes. It was noted that integration of safety theories and the practical elements of system improvement into all levels of education and continuing professional development was needed across the spectrum of care.

Successful collaboration

CPSI's *Education and Professional Development Advisory Committee* is composed of volunteers from various health care fields. Its mandate is to provide advice to CPSI on health care professional education and professional development activities that will improve patient safety. In March 2007, the Committee spearheaded a project to develop a pan-Canadian framework for patient safety competencies. Five specific objectives were identified for the Safety Competencies project:

- Identify the key knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to patient safety competencies for all health care professionals
- Develop a simple, powerful, flexible framework that would act as a benchmark for training, educating and assessing health care professionals in patient safety
- Develop a framework that would allow for its smooth integration into curricula at educational institutions, into the professional development programs of health care associations and directly into patient care sites across the health care delivery spectrum
- Foster inter-professional and inter-organizational collaboration in patient safety
- Help make patient safety competencies easy for everyone to understand and apply

A background paper on the Patient Safety Competencies Project, a literature review and an environmental scan on the extent to which patient safety is integrated into the education and professional development curricula for health providers were all circulated to the Education and Professional Development Committee. Upon review of this material, the Committee found relevant activities taking place across the country, with areas of overlap and duplication, as well as the existence of important gaps.

The Committee originally discussed the possibility of creating a national curriculum for patient safety. However, given regional and language realities, the context of how and where education is offered, and the dynamic nature of research and education, the Committee chose to focus on the competencies in patient safety that should be expected of all practitioners. The Committee first identified the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for patient safety, and then grouped together the areas identified into "buckets" that would eventually become competencies.

CPSI's next step was to choose a partner to coordinate and facilitate the development of what was ultimately branded as The *Safety Competencies Framework*. CPSI chose The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada based on the success of the College's renowned CanMEDS project. A *Steering Committee* of expert educators then came together to oversee the project and to identify the core domains of abilities for all health professionals to incorporate into their work. Seven *working groups* comprised of volunteer inter-professional educators and content experts further developed each domain in summer 2007. The process also included stakeholder consultations involving over 500 organizations across Canada.

A national consensus conference was held in October 2007 to review and consolidate the results of the theme-specific *working groups*. Revisions and further consultations were completed in late 2007 and early 2008. The original seven domains were eventually collapsed into six core domains of competence.

The Safety Competencies

The pan-Canadian framework for patient safety competencies contains six core domains of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes for all health professionals to incorporate into curriculum and in practice. By contributing to patient safety education and professional development of health care practitioners, the Safety Competencies will contribute to the enhancement of patient care. Such was the driving force and the project's vision. The six domains are:

Domain 1: Contribute to a Culture of Patient Safety

A commitment to applying core patient safety knowledge, skills and attitudes to everyday work.

Domain 2: Work in Teams for Patient Safety

Working within interprofessional teams to optimize both patient safety and quality of care.

Domain 3: Communicate Effectively for Patient Safety

Promoting patient safety through effective health care communication.

Domain 4: Manage Safety Risks

Anticipating, recognizing and managing situations that place patients at risk.

Domain 5: Optimize Human and Environmental Factors

Managing the relationship between individual and environmental characteristics in order to optimize patient safety.

Domain 6: Recognize, Respond to and Disclose Adverse Events

Recognizing the occurrence of an adverse event or close call and responding effectively to mitigate harm to the patient, ensure disclosure, and prevent recurrence.

Dissemination and Stakeholder Engagement

During this phase of the project, CPSI is using a multiple launch strategy to share the *Safety Competencies* Framework. CPSI has identified a number of different target audiences who can strategically assist in disseminating the *Safety Competencies* and in accelerating their uptake among the various stakeholders. The goal is to share the competencies, have them integrated into curricula, and used by health care professionals in practice.

Please write to safetycomp@cpsi-icsp.ca, or visit the dedicated website at www.safetycomp.ca for more information on the *Safety Competencies*.

¹The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. The Canadian Patient Safety Dictionary, 2003, p.12.