

GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING NATIONAL PATIENT SAFETY POLICY AND STRATEGIC PLAN

December 2014

Patient Safety Unit /Health Systems and Services Cluster, WHO African Region

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FOREWORD

Unsafe medical practices and care can be the cause of disabling injuries, infections and death.

Even though statistics on patients that are harmed through health care are not readily available, the morbidity, mortality and economic burden is expected to be heavier in developing countries, including the African region, due to limitations in infrastructure, technologies and human resources. Patient safety is therefore a global public health problem which calls for appropriate actions.

WHO launched a patient safety Programme in October 2004 in response to World Health Assembly Resolution WHA55.18 to coordinate, facilitate and accelerate patient safety improvements around the world. Several actions have been undertaken to improve the safety of health care for patients in all WHO Member States. In the African region, initiatives have been launched to address patient safety issues including hand hygiene, antimicrobial resistance, and safer injections. The African Partnerships for Patient Safety (APPS) was set up to build patient safety partnerships amongst hospitals in the WHO African Region and elsewhere.

A technical document adopted in 2008 at the Fifty-eight session of the Regional Committee for Africa on “Patient safety in African health services: issues and solutions” (AFR/RC58/8) proposed a series of actions for improving patient safety in the African Region, and was followed by country specific efforts to promote patient safety practices, including creating awareness amongst patients. Patient Safety could have better and measurable results when it is part of national policy and strategic plans. It is through this process that actions towards improved patient safety could be integrated in primary health care and contributes to the millennium development goals.

This “Guide for developing national Patient Safety policy and strategic plan” aims to assist countries to develop comprehensive actions on patient safety. It outlines steps for the development of comprehensive policies and strategies based on successful pilot site experiences.

I strongly encourage Member States to make use of this guide when developing new or revising the existing patient safety component of their national health policy and strategic plan.

Dr Luis G. Sambo
WHO Regional Director for Africa



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Patient safety practices result in measurable fiscal impact, save lives and decrease morbidity. So, why isn't everyone insisting on such interventions everywhere? The answer is not simple. Patient safety concepts are not clear to those making decisions, research has not been done in many resource-poor settings to confirm data collected elsewhere, and many authorities still have the misconception that introducing patient safety practices is a luxury. Patient safety improvement requires a system change at all levels. Such a change needs a strong national policy accompanied with a strategic implementation plan to ensure the policy's consistency and sustainability.

As a basis for enforcing effective safety practices, a clear policy that serves as a reference and standard by which to judge the practices is critical. A national patient safety policy is essential but it must reflect the context and needs of the individual country. To avoid reinventing the wheel, patient safety policy must reference internationally approved and tested guidelines and policy recommendations. Policy-makers require an accessible resource for the task of developing the national patient safety policy and patient safety strategic plan in order that they are comprehensive as well as precise and yet uncomplicated and flexible. Such a resource ideally will be used both during the initial policy and strategic plan development and for their subsequent revision.

This document outlines a four-step approach for developing a patient safety policy and a strategic plan:

- situation analysis
- national patient safety policy development
- national patient safety strategic plan development
- monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the patient safety policy

This document is intended for guiding the selection of patient safety policy points to ensure that the national policy is comprehensive and adequately detailed. Additionally, it can be used to define the key elements of the national patient safety strategic plan. It also lists indicators that can be adapted for monitoring and evaluation of the policy and strategy's effectiveness at the point of care. Hospital situation analysis tools that may be useful in the assessment and monitoring of patient safety are included.

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