



**World Health  
Organization**

**Patient Safety**

A World Alliance for Safer Health Care

## African Partnerships for Patient Safety



*Working for safer health care... together*

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## Foreword



African Partnerships for Patient Safety (APPS) is a new initiative that forms part of the World Health Organization's (WHO) response to the increasing political commitment and momentum for action on patient safety across Africa.

It is a bi-directional initiative working with identified hospitals in Africa and Europe which aims to establish sustainable partnerships focusing on patient safety and will be aligned with each country's individual health policy framework.

It is concerned with finding innovative solutions for patient safety problems in Africa and ensuring patient safety receives its rightful prominence within health care in the region with collaborative support, as partners, from identified hospitals in Europe.

Improvements to make care safer for patients take time and commitment, and I welcome the energy that the first wave of hospitals has demonstrated in accepting this challenge. The skills and expertise that each partner brings will enrich the body of knowledge for patient safety, not just for APPS, but for all WHO Member States.

**Sir Liam Donaldson**  
Chair  
WHO Patient Safety



## Message from Professor Didier Pittet

Patient safety is a critical challenge in the African region and key priorities identified by African health professionals are driving this new patient safety programme. These priorities include the prevention of health care-associated infection, improvements in waste management, safe surgical care and medication safety.

The programme has already gathered momentum and as it moves forward and expands over the coming years, the vision of establishing partnerships between European hospitals and each of the 46 countries in WHO's African Region will become a reality. Each partnership commits to do its utmost to ensure

sustainability and to act as a national beacon for patient safety knowledge and practice.

In its first wave, APPS is working with six hospital partnerships across Africa and Europe to implement safer health care at the frontline. The passion and energy of these hospital teams are contributing to making safer health care a reality.

For organizations, hospitals and individuals involved in APPS, the message is simple: join together across continents to expand global expertise on patient safety. Together we can make all the difference.

### **Professor Didier Pittet**

Expert Lead  
WHO Patient Safety,  
African Partnerships for Patient Safety

## Introduction

With the growth of globalization and the 'inter-connectedness' of economic, social and cultural development, placing health in an international context is essential. The UK Government's strategy 'Health is Global' (2008) states, "...[it] embraces people across the world because health is determined by problems, issues and concerns that transcend national boundaries."<sup>1</sup>

The drive by international leaders to work together to ensure their country's contribution to international health development is further articulated in a number of recent publications, most notably *The U.S. Commitment to Global Health: Recommendations for the Public and Private Sectors* (2009). With the focus on achieving the Millennium Development Goals<sup>2</sup> by 2015, there is a real sense that the international community and global leaders need to strengthen global health frameworks and develop a humanitarian impetus to improve health indicators.

With many sectors influencing health and health-care delivery, and so many agencies in the field, "improving global health requires co-operative actions and solutions."<sup>3</sup> African Partnerships for Patient Safety is an example of how such cooperative actions and a clear focus on evidence base and culturally and contextually appropriate solutions has the potential to improve the outcome of health care for millions of patients.

1 HM Government (UK) 'Health is Global – A UK Government Strategy, 2008-13' (2008) page 14  
2 The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest. [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml)  
3 As above.





## Background



Patient safety affects everyone in developed and developing countries, with no country yet solving all of its patient safety issues. As in other regions of the world, patient safety is receiving increasing attention in Africa. In 2005, the Kenyan Ministry of Health hosted an event that focused on the importance of patient safety in African countries and launched regional efforts to tackle the issue through WHO Patient Safety. The first joint WHO African Region /WHO Patient Safety Workshop was held in Kigali in December 2007. It focused on patient safety issues in the region and developed recommendations for national policies and strategies to improve the situation. Health care-associated infections (HAI) were at the forefront of discussions and were considered a priority for action in the African Region. HAI was identified as the most frequent adverse event in health care in Africa. In considering infection control constraints and minimum standards for infection control in the African Region at facility level, participants recommended specific measures, namely to:

- Improve hand hygiene compliance/practices
- Raise awareness/sensitize hospital administrators to the impact of poor hand hygiene
- Establish an Infection Control Committee in each African health-care facility
- Improve training and education on HAI and hand hygiene
- Establish monitoring and evaluation of HAI
- Ensure health-care worker protection from HAI.



“An ‘enabling environment’ is fundamental to any change”

Gondar obstetrician in APPS seminar

The Kigali Workshop also highlighted other relevant areas where action on patient safety is required at the individual, organizational and institutional level:

- Quantifying economic and other significant issues associated with health-care errors
- Strengthening health systems using patient safety as an entry point
- Working on patient safety where there are human resource constraints
- Developing effective patient safety policies, guidelines and tools
- Constructing patient engagement mechanisms cognizant of adult illiteracy
- Implementing injection and blood safety interventions
- Developing occupational health to protect health care workers from blood borne pathogens
- Developing waste management mechanisms
- Tackling unsafe surgical care
- Responding to inadequate patient safety data
- Achieving widespread sensitization to patient safety issues.

The commitment of African governments to patient safety, and in particular HAI prevention, was a prominent feature of the 58th WHO African Regional Committee Meeting held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in September 2008. A technical report outlining the major challenges in patient safety in the African Region<sup>4</sup>, including prevalence studies on hospital-wide health care-associated infection from some African countries, highlighted a serious burden of disease.

Twelve proposed actions in response to the patient safety challenges were identified in the report.

1. Develop and implement national policy for patient safety
2. Improve knowledge and learning in patient safety
3. Raise awareness among patients and health-care workers
4. Address the context in which health services and systems are developed
5. Minimize health care-associated infection
6. Protect health-care workers
7. Ensure health-care waste management
8. Ensure safe surgical care
9. Ensure appropriate use, quality and safety of medicines
10. Promote partnerships between patients, family members, health professionals and policy-makers
11. Provide adequate funding
12. Strengthen surveillance and capacity for research.

At a special ministerial signing ceremony, WHO African Member States signed a pledge outlining their intention to take action to address health care-associated infection.

4 Patient Safety in African Health Services: Issues and Solutions, Report of the Regional Director to the 58th Regional Committee, September 2008



## African Partnerships for Patient Safety (APPS)

In 2008, in discussion with African countries, England and Switzerland, WHO Patient Safety initiated a new programme named African Partnerships for Patient Safety (APPS), as a pathway for developing safer patient care.

As part of this collaborative approach, alignment of programme planning and implementation with the WHO Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) in individual African countries is a priority. Ministries of health – integral to joint CCS development – are therefore natural partners throughout programme implementation.

The 12 action areas identified by the WHO African Region form the focus of all APPS activity and underpin the entire programme.

The initial focus of activity will be within hospitals, with hospitals in

A framework has been established through the publication *Health is Global*, on which to build the English partners' contribution to APPS. There are ten principles underpinning the strategy and three in particular are relevant to the APPS programme.

- **Principle 2:** base our global health policies and practice on sound evidence, especially public health evidence, and work with others to develop evidence where it does not exist
- **Principle 8:** Learn from other countries' policies and experience in order to improve the health and well-being of the UK population and the way we deliver health care
- **Principle 10:** work in partnership with other governments, multilateral agencies, civil society and business in pursuit of

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