

2022.11.14 HHS Convening to Advance Patient Safety

Transcript of remarks by AHRQ Director Robert Valdez

Robert Valdez: Thank you very much. And thank you those of you in the room and thanks to the approximately 800 people who are joining us in the live stream. Thanks to your staffs and their families for all the sacrifices that have been made in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has really tested our healthcare systems in so many, so many ways. Many of us have suffered the loss of lives like never before in our families, among our colleagues, in our workforce, and in our communities. And as we recover, we still face many other challenges. So, thank you for joining us in person and online to recommit to advancing patient safety and workforce safety. Thanks to the national steering committee on patient safety members, who have developed a national action plan to help guide the National Alliance as the Secretary is launching today.

We made slow but steady progress in the decade before the COVID-19 pandemic. The early pandemic demands strained our healthcare institutions at all levels and continue to test our mettle as healthcare leaders. Patient safety gains were lost, and our workforce faced additional safety issues these last few years, but we can all be safer and provide higher-quality care for our communities. As this chart shows you, safety issues affect the quality-of-care people receive in all of our healthcare settings. Some groups experienced worse care than others, as illustrated through this chart that you can find in the AHRQ's 20th annual National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report, which was issued a couple of weeks ago. Yet we know how to improve safety by creating and promoting a safety culture that engages our workforce, and identifying the hazards that affect their performance, and listening patients and their families in the care that we provide, and using evidence to improve our practices and environments. Healthcare is not safe until we are all safe.

Next slide. AHRQ is here to help you achieve quadruple aim. In Sacramento -- in the Sacramento area where the Secretary hails, there was a hospital that has a fairly long history of mediocre safety. But like many hospitals strained by the COVID pandemic, its patient safety events rose sharply during 2020 and 2021. But in early 2022 under new leadership that embraces the safety culture and that implements evidence-based practices, its safety rating has shot up and they are now among the best in the country and its employees feel safer and more secure as they come to work. Your patient safety learning labs regenerate the evidence and actionable knowledge you need to make informed decisions and improve safety.

In our Making Safe -- Healthcare Safer website, you can find continuously updated patient safety, harm, and practice reports that can assist you with your decision-making. As one of my professors at the University of Michigan used to say, and many of you know him, Professor John Griffith, and he's taught as well that a well-managed healthcare organization use evidence-based practices to improve its performance. AHRQ aims to help you and your organization achieve the quadruple aim by providing evidence, actionable knowledge, and the tools that can be used to improve staff and patient experience.

Next slide, please. We look forward to building this Alliance together. And for those of you online who we can't hear today, we will be issuing a request for information and we ask everyone to send us your suggestions and your ideas for how we can build this Alliance and make it more effective. AHRQ wishes to provide you with the evidence and the tools that you need. So, if you could share your views regarding the following questions, that would be most helpful. What's the most pressing evidence that you need and your colleagues need? What kinds of internal operational improvement measures would be most helpful to you? What tools data or other assistance do you need to advance patient and workforce safety that AHRQ helped you develop?

Thank you again for all that you've done and continue to do to keep our communities healthy and safe during this COVID-19 pandemic. I invite Dr. Houry to the podium to share with you what CDC has been doing to improve patient safety and our workforce and to hear your suggestions.