

2022.11.14 HHS Convening to Advance Patient Safety

Transcript of remarks by CDC Acting Principal Deputy Director Debra Houry

Debra Houry: Well, good afternoon. I'm Deb Houry. I'm the acting principal deputy director at CDC. And I have been an ER doc all my life, up until about a year ago, still seeing patients in clinic. So, this topic is really near and dear to my heart. At CDC, we work actively to protect patients and healthcare workers from diseases, as well as injuries and exposures to dangerous substances. But we also really look to how we can prevent outbreaks through things like antibiotic stewardship programs and highlighting and preventing unsafe injection practices.

Next slide. So, I know that you're very aware of all the different impacts that the pandemic has had on patient safety. One I want to highlight is the impact it had on healthcare-associated infections. We were making great progress from 2015 to 2019 on many different hospitals acquired infections. And here you can see a 40 percent reduction in central line-associated bloodstream infections during that time. However, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found resistance to hospital-onset infections and deaths both increased in at least 15 percent and we have lost years of safety progress during the pandemic.

Next slide. We also know that healthcare personnel harm rose during the pandemic, certainly among those on the frontlines, but our public health workers and social systems workers as well. This slide shows that over 249 percent increase in injury and illness among health workers and when you add in social assistance workers combined with that, that was the highest rate of injury and illness among any profession during this time, which I think is startling. We know there were many reasons for this, including some of the supply chain issues, the long and irregular work hours, the shortages that we were facing pre-pandemic but have been exacerbated during the pandemic, and just all the risks from diseases and drugs on the frontlines. I know we talked about returning to pre-COVID. I don't think there will ever be the normal we had before, if you want to call that normal, but I think recognizing what our new normal is and figuring out how to keep patients and healthcare workers safe under these circumstances.

Next slide. So, at CDC, we've certainly had a lot of lessons learned during the COVID pandemic, but even taking a step back further and realizing that our agency has changed over the past decade. And so, we have really taken an inward look at where we can be more nimble, more flexible, and work more closely with our partners. And here, you can see several of the goals that we have as part of our new re-envisioned agency, including sharing scientific findings and data easier and faster. And this, in turn, will improve our services and we know this is critical to advancing patient safety while developing and implementing best available practices using timely data to drive decisions. I also wanted to highlight for this group, we're developing an office to coordinate external affairs modeled after HHS and this office will help partners navigate CDC serving as a front door for partners. So, we look forward to working with you really in this streamlined fashion.

And last slide, please. I just wanted to highlight a few examples of ways we can work together to protect patients and healthcare personnel. Two, in particular, I wanted to highlight are providing direct support to facilities through state and local partners and partnerships with CMS. And we were able to work with health departments to provide surge support to address staff shortages and to really train and deploy strike teams to assist skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities with known or suspected COVID-19 outbreaks.

And then also when you look at ensuring healthcare personnel are trained in our first year of CDC's project frontline. With partners, we're able to develop 130 educational products and have more than 200 events on infection prevention and control, which in over 16,000 healthcare workers. I look forward to hearing from all of you today, the data that we can help collect to really inform patient safety to where we can work more closely with you on the ground and partnership, and really look forward to the discussion.

And with that, I'd like to pass it on to Jonathan Blum from CMS. Thank you.