

10 FACTS ON PATIENT SAFETY

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Patient safety is a serious global public health issue. In recent years, countries have increasingly recognized the importance of improving patient safety. In 2002, WHO Member States agreed on a World Health Assembly resolution on patient safety.

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Estimates show that in developed countries as many as one in 10 patients is harmed while receiving hospital care. The harm can be caused by a range of errors or adverse events.

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In developing countries, the probability of patients being harmed in hospitals is higher than in industrialized nations. The risk of health care-associated infection in some developing countries is as much as 20 times higher than in developed countries.

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At any given time, 1.4 million people worldwide suffer from infections acquired in hospitals. Hand hygiene is the most essential measure for reducing health care-associated infection and the development of antimicrobial resistance.

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At least 50% of medical equipment in developing countries is unusable or only partly usable. Often the equipment is not used due to lack of skills or commodities. As a result, diagnostic procedures or treatments cannot be performed. This leads to substandard or hazardous diagnosis or treatment that can pose a threat to the safety of patients and may result in serious injury or death.

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In some countries, the proportion of injections given with syringes or needles reused without sterilization is as high as 70%. This exposes millions of people to infections. Each year, unsafe injections cause 1.3 million deaths, primarily due to transmission of blood-borne pathogens such as hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus and HIV.

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Surgery is one of the most complex health interventions to deliver. More than 100 million people require surgical treatment every year for different medical reasons. Problems associated with surgical safety in developed countries account for half of the avoidable adverse events that result in death or disability.

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The economic benefits of improving patient safety are compelling. Studies show that additional hospitalization, litigation costs, infections acquired in hospitals, lost income, disability and medical expenses have cost some countries between US\$ 6 billion and US\$ 29 billion a year.

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Industries with a perceived higher risk such as aviation and nuclear plants have a much better safety record than health care. There is a one in 1,000,000 chance of a traveler being harmed while in an aircraft. In comparison, there is a one in 300 chance of a patient being harmed during health care.

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Patients' experience and their health are at the heart of the patient safety movement. The World Alliance for Patient Safety is working with 40 champions – who have in the past suffered due to lack of patient safety measures – to help make health care safer worldwide.

http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/patient_safety/en/index.html