

Abstract

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Errors in health care settings: how to avoid them

Healthcare professionals need to understand patient care errors as a main topic to an accurate patient diagnosis and to reduce the incidence of adverse events.

Hospital-acquired injuries are not reported in the newspapers like jumbo-jet crashes, for the simple reason that they occur one at a time in different locations. Although error rates are substantial, serious injuries due to errors are not part of the everyday experience of healthcare professionals, but are perceived as isolated and unusual events - "outliers". Frequently errors do no harm and they are intercepted by the patient's defenses. As Prof. Leape said "Errors are not diseases; they are symptoms of diseases". Several principles were described in reports that have been used in industries to reduce and/or prevent/avoid errors, such as organizational principles, namely standardization and generalization of processes, or human centered principles as avoiding reliance on memory and vigilance.

Ergonomic work design or redesign is one of the methodologies that we can use in order to increase patient safety: (i) redesigning work can lead to more efficient and effective use of healthcare professionals; (ii) redesigning work offers many opportunities to reduce chances for error; (iii) redesigning work can lead to an improved worker safety. The environment, the equipment and technology, the organizational factors, the healthcare professionals, and the task are a single work system that needs being always balanced.

Understanding work is the only way to prevent errors and that includes understanding: (i) the healthcare national policy that may be the an important basis of local errors; (ii) the physical environment that can be sources of error; (iii) the tools and technologies that are being used to perform the tasks, and that can increase the likelihood of adverse events; (iv) the organization that allows exposure to hazard; (v) the individual characteristics of each healthcare professional performing an objective work; and (vi) the tasks that are being performed and their characteristics that may contribute to unsafe patient care. Understanding this work system it is possible programming solutions for improving work and patient safety that may involving the elimination of undesirable aspects of the workplace. If it is not possible to eliminate them, since there are constraints due to the physical design, to the infrastructure, to the environment, to recruitment constraints, to cost, to healthcare pressures, it is important to come up with ergonomic work solutions that take into account the real work in each workplace for each healthcare professional and try to minimize their impact on workers and patient safety.

Participatory ergonomics programs improve worker participation, and the organizational support of healthcare administrations. Ergonomics can help raise employees' awareness regarding patient safety and worker safety. Within hospitals, since healthcare professionals are involved and informed, Ergonomics approaches tend to have a higher acceptance and contributes to a safer place with safer patients.