
Pandemic Spotlights The Urgent Need For A National Patient Safety Board



September 17th is WHO's World Patient Safety Day. There's no better moment in history to call for new legislation that finally ensures health worker and patient safety.

Today, the [Patient Safety Movement Foundation](#) released a [detailed white paper](#) and its leadership issued the following statement urging the creation of a National Patient Safety Board:

"COVID-19 has exposed the safety gaps in our healthcare system that already cause 200,000 deaths a year. We need a National Patient Safety Board.

The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 is also approaching 200,000, with *The New York Times* recently [reporting](#) that the milestone may already have been crossed when considering that 'official death counts may be substantially underestimating the overall effects of the virus.' But even pre-pandemic, more than 200,000 Americans die each year from another epidemic: preventable errors in hospitals. This fact makes preventable medical harm the unspoken [third-leading cause of death](#) in the U.S. If you're shocked, you're not alone: [79 percent of Americans](#) don't know that the safety of patients is compromised every day in healthcare.

Health worker safety is patient safety, and we're at a breaking point in this cause as the death tolls intersect.

The reality is systemic problems in healthcare, such as a failure to embrace a transparent and just culture or the failure to implement known solutions to challenges like healthcare-associated infections and medication safety, have been continuously setting up our health workers for failure and error year after year. Negative OSHA rates, DART rates and the medical profession generally topping the career-burnout lists meant the crisis was always starting on a shaky foundation. Now with COVID-19 pushing health workers to the breaking point, the issue couldn't be more timely. 2020 has been one of the most challenging and eye-opening years for the issues of safety in our healthcare systems, from effectively equipping and supporting frontline health workers in their important work to equitably serving and treating patients. More than 1,000 caregivers have lost their lives doing what they love doing best – taking care of patients. According to [NBC News](#) and a survey conducted by nursing app Holliblu, 62 percent of more than 1,000 respondents said they are planning to quit either their jobs or the profession altogether because of the pandemic. This is unacceptable.

We need a National Patient Safety Board

Despite the fanfare around medical technology and breakthroughs, the fastest and most sustainable solutions for saving more than 200,000 lives per year — and more, during pandemics and other extraordinary challenges — is reducing the number of system and process breakdowns. We must put health workers, and thus patients, first by finally establishing a National Patient Safety Board (NPSB). This would solve the problem in three key ways:

- **Data-driven insight and standards:** An NPSB would create and maintain a National Patient Safety Database to receive non-identifiable patient safety work product. The Board would facilitate the reporting, collection, and analysis of patient safety data and the development and dissemination of training guidelines and other recommendations to reduce medical errors and improve patient safety and quality of care.
- **Transparency and accountability:** The NPSB would also require an on-going analysis of the patient safety data in the Database and other available data to determine performance and systems standards, tools, and best practices (including peer review) for doctors and other health care providers necessary to prevent medical errors, improve patient safety, and increase accountability within the health care system.
- **Align incentives:** An NPSB would save lives and taxpayer dollars by aligning incentives, especially Medicare reimbursements, with proven patient safety protocols.

COVID-19 shouldn't be the breaking point for our health workers, but it should be the breaking point for our tolerance of the lack of patient safety.

Congress must act today on this bipartisan issue.”

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