

Ten Steps to Enhance Healthcare Employees' Safety

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Healthcare employees sustain serious occupational injuries related to the physically demanding work of moving dependent patients, residents, and clients. In order to improve less-than-stellar employee injury records, healthcare organizations must change how they are driving and communicating the value of employee safety.

So how do you do this?

Keep reading to discover 10 steps your organization can implement to move to a culture of safety for **both patients and employees**.

10 Steps for Driving Patient and Employee Safety

1. **Engage a corporate risk/safety management oversight committee and link this work to the mission, vision and values of the organization. Have the CEO communicate the importance of this team's work by beginning each meeting with these guiding principles as the structure that keeps you all going to the common goals of equalized employee and patient safety.** This multi-disciplined team of clinicians, risk management safety professionals, and operations team members will develop policies and procedures to guide the organization's employee safety initiative. Final policies and procedures will be reviewed and endorsed by the executive committee/policy process.
2. **Compile health and safety contact information.** Document **who** in the organization leads safety/risk management and **how** that person(s) should be contacted. Also include each person's responsibilities, scope, and services.
3. **Disseminate safety alerts.** When root cause analyses identify a systemic cause of a safety concern, alert regional offices of this incident and appropriate employee safety prevention steps to be taken.
4. **Share daily safety advisories with all team members.** Begin and end each employee's day with short, positive safety thoughts to advise everyone of the importance of safety all day long. The words and language we speak and hear every day affect our behavior and our outlook. Make sure that language is positive.
5. **Build automated accident and injury management systems (AIMS).** There's a saying in management that goes, "What gets measured, gets done." Use this as an incentive to determine what employee safety metrics should be measured, evaluated, and refined. This system should mirror the system you have in place for reviewing patient incident reporting and analysis. Use of an automated system that provides a "dashboard" can show you, at a glance, whether employee safety metrics are within range or are unacceptable.

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All operations managers must be involved in monitoring these metrics with their front line and regional staff to address trends and loss costs. The leading indicators of safety outlined and communicated to staff at the regional level will be measured annually in each employee's performance review.

6. **Conduct safety operations assessment reviews (SOAR).** To help **drive** the safety program (versus passively waiting like a passenger for the numbers to improve), conduct annual and unannounced audits of safety systems. Have designated staffs perform a partial or complete safety program implementation effectiveness review and communicate results to senior leadership. These findings will drive corrective action discussions at the system and regional levels.
7. **Create an operations and safety playbook.** This playbook will be placed on the intranet and will contain monthly safety themes/topics and sample leading actions (indicators) for safety that your organization should take. It should also include the various training, documentation, and self-auditing tools to ensure these operations' practices are genuine, dynamic practices and not just documents in an electronic file.
8. **Provide additional training for managers via a Manager's Safety/Risk Management Program Guide.** Create this guide to deliver additional higher level training to managers. The emphasis should be on understanding why employee safety and employee safety communication are important and beneficial to the organization. Managers should also learn practices for effectively managing employees' expectations and the safety processes.
9. **Appoint peer mentors/leaders for employee safety.** Encourage or even require risk management team members to collaborate with clinical staff members to serve as peer mentors and leaders for employee safety. Their objective is to perform high risk assessments and to develop care plans that include employee and patient safety systems. These equal systems will be communicated prior to patient contact to ensure that all parties (employees, Supervisors and eventually patients) are agreeing to the necessary safety measures. If agreements for safety cannot be agreed upon by all parties, services will be stopped until an agreement can be found or not rendered.
10. **Create an employee focused safety committee-not a Joint Commission Compliance Crew.** Create an employee safety committee to review all incidents and ensure that root causes have been found and that corrective actions have been taken. The safety committee must include front-line members as well as members of the management team. Meetings must be on paid time and foster a culture of prevention.

If your organization can make a serious commitment to implementing these ten steps, you will see a significant improvement in employee safety, patient safety, and even employee morale.