

THE NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM

STANDARDIZING A PATIENT SAFETY TAXONOMY

PURPOSE

This project will establish consensus on a standardized taxonomy for patient safety. Having a standardized taxonomy will facilitate the management of patient safety data across reporting systems and should support patient safety data management innovation.

BACKGROUND

Widespread efforts are now underway to identify and report healthcare errors and other patient safety-related information. Unfortunately, at present, there is no ability to combine or aggregate, compare, and analyze data from across the many public and private reporting systems because there is no standardized taxonomy for classifying the data. There is an urgent need for consensus on a standardized patient safety taxonomy that uses a clearly defined lexicon and that provides a common framework for aggregating data.

A recent report by the Institute of Medicine (*Patient Safety: Achieving a New Standard of Care*) of the National Academy of Sciences reviewed some existing patient safety reporting systems and taxonomies and proposed a set of domain areas for a common patient safety reporting format. Efforts are underway by numerous public and private organizations to address the more detailed components of a complete patient safety taxonomy. For example, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) has collaborated with several other healthcare entities to assess various nascent patient safety taxonomies and has proposed a candidate standardized taxonomy. Researchers assessing medical errors in primary care have also developed a taxonomy for describing patient safety events in this setting, and other work has focused on clinical laboratories.

SCOPE

This project will:

- Consider the strengths and weaknesses of the taxonomy proposed by the JCAHO;
- Solicit and consider alternative taxonomies and classification schemes that are in use or development;
- Advance a candidate standardized taxonomy for review per the NQF's formal consensus process;
- Address issues related to the implementation of the standardized taxonomy and its integration into existing clinical nomenclatures, software applications, and patient safety reporting systems, to facilitate the early adoption of the taxonomy; and
- Propose a mechanism for regularly updating and refining the taxonomy.

THE NQF PROCESS

This consensus project will be guided by a Steering Committee comprising critical stakeholders, including consumers, providers, purchasers, researchers, and other potential users. Agreement about the taxonomy will be developed through NQF's formal Consensus Development Process.¹

FUNDING

This project is supported in part by the California HealthCare Foundation and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

For more information, contact the National Quality Forum at 202.783.1300 or info@qualityforum.org.

¹ National Quality Forum. *The National Quality Forum's Consensus Development Process version 1.6*. Washington, DC: National Quality Forum, 2003.

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