



POSITION PAPER

ADVERSE MEDICAL INCIDENTS

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

Health care is a high-risk, 24-7 environment. Most healthcare interactions between practitioner and patient are error-free, but some naturally will result in adverse medical incidents. Such incidents are defined as an unintended injury or complication which results in disability of a patient at the time of discharge, death or prolonged hospital stay and is caused during healthcare management, rather than by the underlying disease process.

Reduction in the number of adverse medical incidents would contribute significantly to a reduction in healthcare costs, in general. Adverse medical incidents involving patients—incurred by commission or omission—have been steadily rising in Canada in the past decade. The most prevalent types of adverse medical incidents include: prescribing the wrong dose of medicine, failure to notice the warning signs on instruments indicating bodily changes, communication breakdowns between practitioners when administering care, equipment malfunctions and mistakes as a result of healthcare staff fatigue or work overload.

Health care personnel generally are aware of the increasing frequency of adverse medical incidents, which mostly are preventable. They are supportive of disclosure and opening the subject to greater scrutiny and more research in an effort to find solutions and ways to reduce risks and the causes of such events.

Government needs to be a part of this activity and make a concerted effort to play a role in the reduction of risks associated with adverse medical incidents. Success can only be realized with an extraordinary level of collaboration and coordination across the health care sector and the involvement of Government.

HIROC'S ROLE & INITIATIVES

Promoting patient safety is at the core of HIROC's mandate. We are working with our partner organizations to contribute to risk reduction, in general, and specifically to reduce the frequency of adverse medical incidents. We are working to establish educational programs, improve measurement and evaluation processes, and proposing changes to tort and subrogation legislation designed to improve patient safety.

HIROC is also the largest healthcare liability insurer in Canada. While insurance is our business, our vision is the safest healthcare system. We work to realize this vision by sponsoring educational programs and events and by partnering with other organizations, institutions and governments. Structured as a reciprocal, our risk management practices are based on risk dispersion amongst our large group of member/subscribers and growth and protection of capital for claims settlement.

One of our major initiatives recognizes the need to assist our subscribers in the identification and management of risk and patient safety issues. Based on a Risk Management Assessment tool that HIROC developed in the early 1990s, we conducted a comprehensive review of 15 years of reported claims and a trends analysis of the frequency, severity and preventability of hazards. This led to the development in 2000 of a new HIROC educational tool called RMSAM—Risk Management Self-Appraisal Modules, dealing with risk management in specific areas of the healthcare environment. New modules subsequently have been added, and RMSAM was recently expanded to include modules devoted to hazards and exposures frequently experienced by health care organizations.

POSITION STATEMENT & CALL TO ACTION

HIROC believes patient safety should be a national priority and encourages government to support this position, as well as recognize the need for integrated initiatives to improve patient safety. The main role that Government can play is to improve legal and regulatory processes—including legislation related to evidence, tort and subrogation—and to improve information and data sharing processes. It is also important for Government to provide funding to support improvements to information technology infrastructures for collecting, reporting and tracking patient-safety data.