

The patient safety journey in Portugal: Challenges and opportunities from a public health perspective

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Abstract

Despite improvements in healthcare interventions, the incidence of adverse events and other patient safety problems constitutes a major contributor to the global burden of diseases and a concern for Public Health. In the last years there have been some successful individual and institutional efforts to approach patient safety issues in Portugal, unless such effort has been fragmented or focused on specific small areas. Long-term and global improvement has remained elusive, and most of all the improvement of patient safety in Portugal, must evaluate not only the efficacy of a change but also what was effective for implementing the change. Clearly, patient safety issues result from various combinations of individual, team, organization, system and patient factors. A systemic and integrated approach to promote patient safety must acknowledge and strive to understand the complexity of work systems and processes in health care, including the interactions between people, technology, and the environment. Safety errors cannot be productively attributed to a single human error. Our objective with this paper is to provide a brief overview of the status quo in patient safety in Portugal, highlighting key aspects that should be taken into account in the design of a strategy for improving patient safety. With these key aspects in mind, policy makers and implementers can move forward and make better decisions about which changes should be made and about the way the needed changes to improve patient safety should be implemented. The contribution of colleagues that are international leaders on healthcare quality and patient safety may also contribute to more innovative research methods needed to create the knowledge that promotes less costly successful changes.

Keywords

Public health; patient safety; adverse events; health strategy; health policy