



## Role of Communication in Patient Safety

Patient safety is an important topic in all healthcare settings, and preventing and reducing falls is a large part of patient safety. Many times patients are cared for by a number of health care providers throughout their stay. Communication among the team is highly complex but important in the delivery of safe effective care. Clinical communication remains the most frequent contributor to sentinel events reported to Joint Commission. Studies have shown that negative communication among the healthcare team can greatly decrease patient safety. However on the plus side, positive team factors help to limit the impact of adverse events by identifying the risk and working together to create a plan to increase safety.

Identifying negative communication is the first step in positively impacting healthcare communication. The three types of team communication breakdowns that are at the root of most incidents that impact patient safety are as follows:

- Different interactive styles. Many times the team members are from different backgrounds or health care disciplines, which often means they have different communication styles. If they fail to accommodate for the different styles, it can often lead to misunderstandings.
- Role conflict or confusion. When a member of a health care team is unsure about their specific role or is confused about the role of other team members, communication usually suffers.
- Chain of command unclear. Any uncertainty or anxiety may hinder conveying of important patient information from one team member to another, putting the patient at risk.

These gaps in communication can cause serious breakdowns in the continuity of care, inappropriate treatment and potential harm to the patient. It is imperative for patient safety to avoid communication pitfalls and increase positive communication among the health care team. Each setting should assess and identify any communication pitfall among their team and develop personalized strategies to increase team communication and increase patient safety.

### References:

The Joint Commission  
World Health Organization  
“Improving Clinical Communication and Patient Safety: Clinician-Recommended Solutions by Donna Woods, Susan Echiverri, and Julia Barnathan.