

10 Steps to Implement a New Patient Safety Coach Program

Implementing a new Patient Safety Coach (PSC) program in a hospital or healthcare setting requires the ability to successfully bring about *Change*. The organization must change in order to facilitate, support, and embrace the role Patient Safety Coaches will have. In addition, individual staff perspectives will need to change through education, visioning, and powerful stories that reveal the impact Patient Safety Coaches have on driving improvements in patient safety. These changes will significantly advance the hospital/health system's efforts toward achievement of the high reliability goal of Zero Patient Harm. The following change facilitation practices (Based on John Kotter's Eight Step Process of Creating Major Change) and PSC program attributes have proven to be essential steps in creating and sustaining an effective Patient Safety Coach program:

1. **Create a sense of urgency for the change** – Hospitals/healthcare systems that continue to experience unacceptable levels of patient harm must adopt better methods of performance improvement. Patient Safety Coaches represent a significant functional change that is proven to dramatically improve patient safety. Patient Safety Coaches embedded in all sharp-end patient care teams work to ingrain the consistent use of error-prevention tools and tactics into the performance of patient care teams, strengthen safeguards and defenses to protect patients from errors, and cultivate a culture of mindfulness to counter the threat of complacency. Patient Safety Coaches advocate for the consistent, competent, and continuous use of safe care practices to improve patient safety. Everyone needs a coach and Patient Safety Coaches help ensure that all patient care staff exceed their Behavior Based Expectations by changing unsafe behaviors into safe behaviors – for every patient, all the time.
2. **Build and maintain a guiding coalition** – Successfully implementing any substantive change initiative in an organization cannot be accomplished by a single champion of the cause – it will require the support of key influencers and stakeholders knowledgeable about internal operations and decision making controls. Conduct an ARMI Analysis to identify areas of potential resistance to the change initiative in the organization and who the Approvers, Resources, Members of the implementation team, and

Interested Parties are that will facilitate or impede the implementation of the Patient Safety Coach program.

3. **Formulate a strategic vision and define the big opportunity** – By creating a compelling vision that focuses on exploiting the “big opportunity” of significantly improving patient safety, leaders of the change initiative provide a “picture of success” that is feasible and emotionally appealing. For example, “Patient Safety Coaches, embedded in patient care teams throughout the hospital, influence their teammates to reduce the threats of complacency, inconsistent adherence to safe care practices, and staff incompetence resulting in significant improvements in patient safety and the reduction of patient harm.”
4. **Communicate the vision, create buy-in, and attract a growing volunteer army** – The leader of the Change Initiative Team must assess the Technical, Political, and Cultural sources of resistance to the change initiative (adoption of the Patient Safety Coach program) that exist in the organization and design interventions targeted to resolve the root causes of the resistance. The most effective strategy is to recruit volunteers for the new role of Patient Safety Coach -- a role they will perform in addition to their clinical responsibilities, after receiving training in changing behaviors, caring safely, and coaching excellence.
5. **Remove barriers to accelerate movement toward the vision** – Members of the Change Implementation Team should conduct an assessment of the current systems and structures in the organization to determine if any barriers exist that will impede the successful implementation of the change initiative, that is, establishing a Patient Safety Coach program. The team should consider staffing issues, reward systems, organizational design, information systems, and available resources to support the program.
6. **Celebrate visible, significant short-term wins** – Success breeds success. Leaders must communicate and celebrate short-term wins that demonstrate how the change initiative (implementing the Patient Safety Coach program) has benefited the organization and the patients it serves. Helping staff understand how the change helps keep patients safe from harm will increase support for the PSC program throughout the organization and the level of interest among staff to become a Patient Safety Coach themselves. The description of the “Win” should be unambiguous, obvious, and clearly related to the change initiative.

- 7. Keep learning from experience, be adaptive and resilient** – Every new change initiative faces resistance in an organization and must adapt to an ever changing environment. Continually identify sources of resistance – Technical, Political, or Cultural – within the organization and develop interventions to mitigate the resistance, for example, relating stories of “Good Catches” or of Safe Care Practices that Patient Safety Coaches have implemented that have positively impacted patient care.
- 8. Institutionalize the change into the culture of the organization** – Institutionalizing or embedding the change initiative (the new Patient Safety Coach program) into the organization’s culture will occur when Patient Safety Coaches become “the way we do business here” and are widely considered to be integral to providing safe patient care and to meeting the high reliability goal of ZERO patient harm.
- 9. Lead from the top** – According to Edgar Schein, the most powerful change agent is the leader of the organization. Leaders set the example and reinforce the behaviors that are expected of staff in a culture of safety. What leaders pay attention to, measure and control, and the behaviors they reward are critical success factors for the implementation of a Patient Safety Coach program.
- 10. Empower the “Positive Deviants” to champion the change initiative** – The organization’s “Positive Deviants” (Seidman and Grbavac) are nurses, doctors and other patient care staff who exemplify value-driven, patient-centric, safe behaviors and a strong commitment to operational excellence. These Positive Deviants will serve as the foundational driving force behind the successful implementation of the Patient Safety Coach program. They will help facilitate the change in cultural expectations regarding individual competence, behaviors, and performance.

Successfully implementing a significant organizational change initiative like a Patient Safety Coach program in a hospital/healthcare system requires an understanding of change facilitation practices and their utilization. Trying to implement such a change as a single agent of change or concept “champion” often ends in a failed attempt to develop support, acceptance, and eventually, cultural modification. The “10 Steps To Implement a Patient Safety Coach Program” detailed here are drawn from experts in the field of change facilitation and acceleration; these principles are more fully described in *Five Disciplines for Zero Patient Harm* (Health Administrative Press, Chicago 2019).