Patient Identification

Throughout the healthcare industry, the failure to correctly identify patients continues to result in medical errors. Accurate identification reduces the risks and consequences of patient misidentification, consequently improving patient safety. Patient misidentification has been shown as a root cause of many errors. The Joint Commission has listed improving patient identification accuracy as the first of its National Patient Safety Goals for 2014. The goal of using two patient identifiers is to reliably identify the individual as the person for whom the service or treatment is intended and to match the service or treatment to that individual.\(^1\) It makes sense that using two patient identifiers increases the potential for identifying the correct patient and decreases the potential for patient misidentification. A standardized process is the foundation of all safe patient identification practices.

What do you mean by two patient identifiers?

The two identifiers may be in the same location, such as a wristband. It is the person-specific information that is the “identifier,” not the medium on which that information resides. Acceptable identifiers include the individual's name, an assigned identification number, telephone number, or other person-specific identifier. Electronic identification technology coding, such as bar coding or RFID, that includes two or more person-specific identifiers (not room number) will comply with this requirement. Please remember that active patient involvement is also required in EP 1.\(^2\)

The patient identification process should begin when the patient presents for medical care. The process should include obtaining a positive identification of the patient such as picture identification. The full name, date of birth and home address are elements that should be considered in the identification process. Based on the type of treatment to be provided, additional elements such as blood typing information should be implemented as part of the identification process. Most patients have more than one encounter with a provider, and the same process should be utilized on second and subsequent encounters.

Appropriate identification of patients impacts documentation. The medical record serves many purposes with the primary purpose to support and coordinate the medical care of a patient. Clinical communication is another way to describe the medical record. A good medical record is legible, timely, accurate, objective, complete and factual. Appropriate identification of a patient impacts documentation. Recording in the wrong patient’s chart is among the common documentation problems that can compromise care.\(^3\)

Regardless of the technology or methods used for accurately identifying patients, careful planning for the processes of care will ensure proper identification prior to any medical intervention and provide safer care with significantly fewer errors.

MagMutual Risk Management and Patient Safety Consultants invite our policyholders’ questions. If you wish to discuss issues related to this article, or have other questions please call us at 1-800-282-4882, and ask for Risk Management.

Related topics: NPSG, Medical Records

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\(^1\) NPSG (CAMAC / Ambulatory Health Care) Two Patient Identifiers - NPSG - Goal 1 - 01.01.01 www.jointcommission.org/mobile/standards_information/jcafaqdetails.aspx?StandardsFAQId=145&StandardsF
Webinar: Patient Identification [2]

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