Patient Safety
Listed
PSO
Organization

AHRQ
Common Formats

Choosing a Patient Safety Organization
Tips for Hospitals and Health Care Providers

Background

The Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act of 2005 (Patient Safety Act) authorized the creation of Patient Safety Organizations (PSOs). It encourages clinicians and health care organizations to voluntarily report to, and share quality and patient safety information with, PSOs without fear of legal discovery. PSOs help health care professionals learn from data on patient safety events to prevent them from happening in the future.

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), a part of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, administers the PSO program.

Benefits of Working With a PSO

PSOs serve as independent, external experts who can collect, analyze, and aggregate clinical data (Patient Safety Work Product) locally, regionally, and nationally to develop insights into the underlying causes of patient safety events.

While working with a PSO is voluntary, it offers many benefits, including:

- Legal privilege and confidentiality of deliberations and analysis of quality and safety events

- Aggregation of patient safety event data, and comparison with peers (de-identified by the PSO Privacy Protection Center)

- Expertise to understand and prevent the causes of patient safety events

- Advice for improving the quality and safety of patient care

- Opportunity to submit nonidentifiable data to the Network of Patient Safety Databases (NPSD) and compare data nationwide

Things to Consider When Choosing a PSO

Health care providers can work with any PSO, so taking the time to think about your organization's needs is important. When researching PSOs, consider posing the following questions to a PSO you would potentially consider working with:

- **Is the PSO "listed" by AHRQ?** If the PSO is not listed, privilege and confidentiality protections of the Patient Safety Act will not apply. To find out if a PSO is listed, visit AHRQ's Web site section on Listed PSOs, updated weekly at www.pso.ahrq.gov/listing/psolist.htm.

- **Do you need a PSO that specializes in a particular area of care?** Some PSOs specialize by topic area, such as anesthesia or medication adverse

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES • USA

AHRQ
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
Advancing Excellence in Health Care • www.ahrq.gov

PATIENT SAFETY

events, while other PSOs may handle all kinds of patient safety events. Providers can opt to work with more than one PSO, depending on their needs.

- **Where is the PSO located?** Any PSO can operate nationwide, but some providers may prefer to work with a PSO that is based in their geographic area.

- **What other providers are working with the PSO?** Consider the type and number of providers who work with the PSO. For example, you may wish to work with a PSO that contracts with providers similar to yours.

- **Does the PSO provide direct assistance to its clients or does it use consultants?** Find out if the PSO's expertise comes from internal staff or external consultants.

- **How does the PSO handle your data?** Discuss the policies and procedures that the PSO has in place for handling data. Data submitted to a PSO must be handled in accordance with the Patient Safety Rule to remain protected.

- **Does the PSO use the NPSD?** The NPSD aggregates nonidentifiable information on patient safety (not traceable to any specific facility, provider, or patient) on a national basis to identify quality and safety problems and their solutions more quickly and effectively. The more data that PSOs submit, the more we can learn about improving patient safety.

- **Does the PSO use AHRQ's Common Formats?** PSOs are required to collect and analyze data in a standardized manner. AHRQ created the Common Formats (common definitions and reporting formats) to facilitate the collection and reporting of patient safety events and to improve health care providers' efforts to eliminate harm. Read more about Common Formats at www.pso.ahrq.gov/formats/commonfmt.htm.

- **Other factors to consider when selecting a PSO:**
    – Which types of analysis and what services does the PSO offer, and are they valuable to you?
    – How does the PSO stay up to date about current patient safety practices, and how does it get help if it has questions?
    – Will the PSO help you set up a patient safety evaluation system?
    – Does the PSO have a good understanding of patient safety rules and regulations?

Find a Listed PSO

AHRQ is responsible for officially listing PSOs. To access an updated list of PSOs and their contact information, visit www.pso.ahrq.gov/listing/psolist.

PSO Contacts

PSO Office
Center for Quality Improvement and Patient Safety
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
540 Gaither Road
Rockville, MD 20850

Email: PSO@ahrq.hhs.gov

Telephone (toll free): 866-403-3697
Telephone (local): 301-427-1111

TTY (toll free): 866-438-7231
TTY (local): 301-427-1130