



# Choosing a Patient Safety Organization

## Tips for Hospitals and Health Care Providers



### Background

Your organization is committed to making health care better and safer for your patients. But achieving this goal is no small feat. You and your staff must collect data, identify quality and safety problems, design improvement processes, measure change, provide feedback, and continue to support improved practice. Even more challenging, you must gain the trust of clinicians who may fear the results of acknowledging their role in adverse events.

That's where Patient Safety Organizations, or PSOs, can help.



PSOs were created as part of the Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act of 2005 (Patient Safety Act). The Patient Safety Act encourages clinicians and health care organizations to voluntarily report to and share quality and patient safety information with PSOs confidentially and without fear of legal discovery. Through this process, PSOs can help health care professionals learn from quality and safety events to prevent them from happening in the future.

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



### Benefits of Working With a PSO

PSOs bring several unique advantages that can enhance your organization's patient safety activities. PSOs have experts who can collect, analyze, and aggregate clinical data (known as patient safety work product) at the local, regional, and national level to develop insights into the underlying causes of patient safety events. The feedback and recommendations provided by the PSO to the provider are also protected as patient safety work product.

Working with a PSO is voluntary and offers many benefits, including:

- When certain requirements are met, Federal confidentiality and privilege protections for your work on quality and patient safety.
- Aggregation and analysis of data from each provider and across providers working with that PSO. This aggregation not only enables the PSO to detect patterns and trends not visible in smaller numbers of organizations or smaller health systems, but also uncovers serious and rare events sooner.
- Feedback and expertise to help you understand and prevent the causes of adverse events and to develop successful approaches to improving quality and reducing adverse outcomes.



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- The opportunity to submit nonidentifiable data to the Network of Patient Safety Databases (NPSD) in order to aggregate and compare data on a national level.

## Things To Consider When Choosing a PSO

Health care providers can work with any PSO, so think carefully about your organization's needs. When researching PSOs, consider the following questions:

- **Is the PSO “listed” by AHRQ?**

Many organizations may call themselves “patient safety organizations.” But if the PSO is not listed by AHRQ, Federal confidentiality and privilege protections of the Patient Safety Act will not apply. To find out if a PSO is federally listed, visit [www.pso.ahrq.gov/listing/psolist.htm](http://www.pso.ahrq.gov/listing/psolist.htm).
- **How will the PSO secure your data and protect it from inappropriate disclosure?**

PSOs take a number of approaches to securing data, an increasingly important consideration today. AHRQ does not have specific hardware and software requirements for PSOs with respect to how they protect data, although we clearly define the requirements governing the handling of patient safety work product. Ask the PSO to explain in detail what steps they have taken to secure your data when it resides at the PSO.

- **Does the PSO specialize in a particular area of care?**

Some PSOs specialize by topic area, such as anesthesia or medication adverse events, while other PSOs may handle many kinds of patient safety events. Providers can opt to work with more than one PSO, depending on their needs.

- **Is the PSO's location important to you?**

Because the Patient Safety Act is a Federal law, working with any listed PSO can provide the Federal privilege and confidentiality protections you expect. Some providers may prefer to work with a PSO based in their geographic area. To locate PSOs in your area, visit the AHRQ PSO Web site at [www.pso.ahrq.gov](http://www.pso.ahrq.gov).

- **Does the PSO specialize in a particular health care setting?**

Consider the type and number of providers who already work with the PSO. For example, a nursing home may wish to work with a PSO that already works with nursing homes.

- **Does the PSO contribute data to the NPSD?**

The NPSD aggregates nonidentifiable information on patient safety (cannot be traced to any specific facility, provider, or patient) on a national basis to identify quality and safety trends and patterns and explore and recommend national solutions. The more data PSOs contribute, the faster national learning can occur to promote widespread change and improvement.

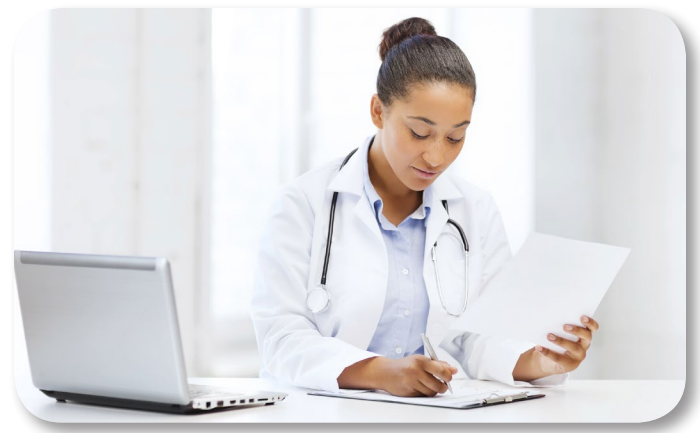
- **Does the PSO use AHRQ's Common Formats?**

Many organizations have very good reporting systems that support their own internal analyses, but these data cannot be aggregated or compared with similar information from other organizations. That's where Common Formats come in. The Formats allow “apples to apples” comparisons that support aggregation of data across organizations and accelerated learning among those who use them in working with PSOs. To date, AHRQ has released Common Formats for hospitals, nursing

homes, and retail pharmacies. In the future, AHRQ plans to release Common Formats for other settings and sites, such as emergency medical services and ambulatory surgery. If you plan to work with a PSO with respect to hospital care, ask if they use the Common Formats.

■ **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?
- Will the PSO help you set up a Patient Safety Evaluation System, which you will need in order to work with a PSO?
- Does the PSO have a good understanding of the Patient Safety Act and its implementing regulation?
- What assistance does the PSO provide, and what are the skill sets of its workforce?
- Do you know anyone at the PSO with whom you would like to work?
- Do you know other providers who are happy with the PSO's services?



## Find a Listed PSO

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

## PSO Contact Information

PSO Office  
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