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Developing an International Patient Safety Event Taxonomy

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Abstract Learning from adverse events is a major building block for safer healthcare. This requires improved analysis and sharing of information about patient safety problems. Initiatives are underway in a number or countries to collect and report patient safety data but definitions for patient safety concepts vary substantially across health care systems. This makes intra- and inter-country comparison complex, cumbersome and inaccurate. An international patient safety event taxonomy aims to enable standardized patient safety event information from different countries. The resulting knowledge base will enable improved analysis of the contributing factors to adverse events leading to the development and implementation of evidence-based preventive strategies and ultimately improved patient safety and care.

Introduction

In 2002, the 55th World Health Assembly resolved to develop global norms for the definition, measurement and reporting of adverse events and near misses in health care (WHA55.18). In line with the focus of this resolution, WHO announced the creation of the World Alliance for Patient Safety in October 2004. One of the six action areas in the World Alliance's *Forward Program 2005* is designed to support the development of an international patient safety event taxonomy.

Currently, the quality and sophistication of existing patient safety event taxonomies vary considerably. Ad hoc approaches, dissimilar methodologies, and a lack of standardized definitions render it almost impossible to aggregate and compare data. As a result, the information yielded from international comparative studies is often of limited value. In order to increase the effectiveness and value of patient safety information from across multiple healthcare systems, a standardized international patient safety event taxonomy is essential.

Work to Date

In June 2003, WHO requested the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations in the United States of America to:

• review available literature on defining and classifying adverse events,

•propose a preliminary method of assessing incident reporting systems worldwide, and

•prepare an accompanying glossary of existing patient safety terms.

In October 2003, a number of technical experts participated in a WHO working group on the development of a patient safety taxonomy and to lay the groundwork for the development of an international patient safety taxonomy.

In 2005, the World Alliance for Patient Safety launched the International Patient Safety Event Taxonomy Project, to build upon the recommendations made in October 2003.

The purpose of the project is to develop an international patient safety event taxonomy according to identified principles and structural and functional criteria, including:

•Being based upon sound taxonomic theory;

•Having a clear, stable, scaleable, organizing principle to ensure elements are logically related;

•Classifying information in a manner to enable knowledge discovery in addition to data warehousing;

•Using a standardized coding system with an associated unambiguous terminology that is descriptive in the patient safety domain;

•Being applicable in across health care delivery settings and specialties;

•Facilitating data aggregation at multiple levels; and

•Generating reproducible results

•Linking closely with developments around key international classifications especially those belonging to the WHO Family of International Classifications and the WHO drug dictionary .

Current Activity

The work that is currently being undertaken by the International Patient Safety Taxonomy Project includes:

•considering the opportunities to build upon the Patient Safety Event Taxonomy (PSET) developed by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations

•the production of a literature review on current taxonomies used in Patient Safety around the world

•the formation of an International Drafting Group to finalise an agreed version of an international taxonomy and initiate field tests on its use.

Next Steps

The first meeting of International Drafting Group will set the framework for future discussion and will aim to establish a detailed roadmap for achieving the ultimate goal.

The ultimate goal of the project is to produce an internationally acceptable and tested version of an international patient safety taxonomy, which can be used to make international comparisons of Patient Safety events across the world.

References

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