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Common Formats

Facilitating Learning from Patient Safety Data



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What are Common Formats?

Almost all U.S. hospitals have some type of system for reporting adverse events. However, organizations can differ in the way they collect data, which makes it difficult to track patient safety trends accurately. A set of common definitions and reporting formats, known as Common Formats, specify the clinical definitions and technical requirements that allow health care providers to exchange data with Patient Safety Organizations (PSOs) and the Network of Patient Safety Databases in an interoperable and standardized manner.

Common Formats optimize the opportunity for the public and private sectors to learn more about trends and patterns in patient safety, with the purpose of improving health care quality for all Americans.

Who Can Use Common Formats?

Patient safety, quality, and risk managers, clinicians, and others can use Common Formats to collect patient safety event information in a standard way—using common language, definitions, technical requirements, and reporting specifications. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) anticipates that most initial users of the Common Formats will be based in hospital settings.

Why do Patient Safety Organizations Use Common Formats?

PSOs use AHRQ's Common Formats to ensure consistency in reporting patient safety event information. PSOs:

- Aggregate data for pattern analysis, learning, and trending, as required by the Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act of 2005.
- Provide analysis of patient safety event information and give feedback to health care providers.
- Facilitate a learning environment that reduces future risk to patients.

Which Common Formats Are Available?

AHRQ has developed and released an initial set of Common Formats for hospitals. These Common Formats may be used to collect data for all types of adverse events, near misses, and unsafe conditions.

Common Formats are available for initial reporting of patient safety events. Formats will be developed in the future for reporting root cause analysis, improvement actions, and effectiveness of improvement actions. In addition, AHRQ plans to expand the scope to other settings, such as long-term care settings and ambulatory surgery centers.

Where Are Common Formats Located?

Common Formats and information for users are accessible online through AHRQ's PSO Web site at: www.pso.ahrq.gov/

