



## Global Patient Safety Challenges

Global Patient Safety Challenges identify a patient safety burden that poses a significant risk to health, then develop frontline interventions and partner with countries to disseminate and implement the interventions. Each Challenge focuses on a topic that poses a major and significant risk to patient health and safety. WHO provides leadership and guidance in collaboration with Member States, stakeholders and experts, to develop and implement interventions and tools to reduce risk, improve safety and facilitate beneficial change.

### Previous Global Patient Safety Challenges

Beginning in 2004, the World Health Organization (WHO) working in partnership with the (then) World Alliance for Patient Safety, initiated the two previous Global Patient Safety Challenges: *Clean Care is Safer Care*, followed a few years later by *Safe Surgery Saves Lives*. Both aimed to gain worldwide commitment and spark action to reduce health care infection and risk associated with surgery, respectively.

The scale and speed of implementation of these Challenges remains unprecedented. They secured strong and rapid commitment from health ministers, professional bodies, regulators, health system leaders, civil society and health care practitioners. Their success resulted from the following solid basis and achievements:

- an evidence-based analysis of the key problems and proposed solutions;
- an invitation to Member States and other relevant parties to pledge, or sign up, to address the aims of the Challenge;
- high-profile actions to generate passion and enthusiasm;
- facilitation of implementation by the WHO Secretariat and associated experts and advisers;
- strong leadership and extensive internal and external communication.

Both Global Patient Safety Challenges were considered to have been highly successful. They achieved engagement, commitment and action across the world.

## The third Global Patient Safety Challenge

### Medication Without Harm

WHO is initiating the third Global Patient Safety Challenge with the theme of medication safety. It is set within the philosophy of patient safety previously developed by WHO, namely that errors are inevitable and provoked in large part by weak health systems, and so the challenge is to reduce their frequency and impact. The Challenge is being launched in March 2017, at the Global Ministerial Summit on Patient Safety in Bonn, Germany. By seeking the commitment of high-level delegates, ministers of health and experts, the launch creates an opportunity for leaders to drive change and work together to make real difference to the lives of patients, families and health workers at the frontline. This Challenge will draw on the experience accumulated during the previous Challenges and will drive a facilitative and developmental process of change to reduce patient harm generated by unsafe medication practices and medication errors.

Every person around the world will, at some point in their life, take medicines to prevent or treat illness. Medicine has forever altered our ability to live with disease and generally increased the duration of our lives. However, medicines do sometimes cause serious harm if taken incorrectly, monitored insufficiently or as the result of an error, accident or communication problem.

Experience from other high-risk industries, and WHO's longstanding work with experts in health care safety, demonstrate that human beings make mistakes rarely through neglect, but instead because the systems, processes and procedures that they work with are often flawed or dysfunctional. This inevitably gives rise to errors and medication harm is no exception to this rule. All medication errors are potentially avoidable. They can thus be greatly reduced or even prevented by improving the systems and practices of medication, including ordering,





prescription, preparation, dispensing, administration and monitoring. Given that the subject is so vast, the approach of this third Challenge aims to save lives and reduce the medication-related harm caused by unsafe practices and errors, by specifically addressing the weaknesses of service delivery and developing more effective health care systems.

### **Severity of the problem**

- Unsafe medication practices and medication errors are a leading cause of avoidable harm in health care systems across the world.
- The scale and nature of this harm differs between low-, middle- and high-income countries. Globally, the cost associated with medication errors has been estimated at US\$ 42 billion annually.
- Low-income countries experience twice as many adverse medication events than high-income countries.
- Medication errors occur when weak medication systems and/or human factors such as fatigue, poor environmental conditions or staff shortages affect prescribing, transcribing, dispensing, administration and monitoring practices,

which can then result in severe harm, disability and even death.

- Errors occur most frequently during administration, however there are risks at different stages of the medication process.

### **Overall goal**

The Global Patient Safety Challenge on Medication Safety focuses on improving medication safety by strengthening the systems for reducing medication errors and avoidable medication-related harm.

### **Reduce the level of severe, avoidable harm related to medications by 50% over 5 years, globally**

The goal of the third Global Patient Safety Challenge on Medication Safety is to gain worldwide commitment and action to reduce severe, avoidable medication-related harm by 50% in the next five years, specifically by addressing harm resulting from errors or unsafe practices due to weaknesses in health systems. The Challenge aims to make improvements at each stage of the medication process, including prescribing, dispensing, administering, monitoring and use.



## Objectives of the Global Challenge on Medication Safety

The Global Patient Safety Challenge on Medication Safety will facilitate a strengthening of systems and practices that can initiate corrective action within countries to improve patient safety and decrease avoidable harm related to medications.

In order to achieve this, the Challenge will adopt five specific objectives.

**1. ASSESS** the scope and nature of avoidable harm and strengthen the monitoring systems to detect and track this harm.

**2. CREATE** a framework for action aimed at patients, health professionals and Member States, to facilitate improvements in ordering, prescribing,

preparation, dispensing, administration and monitoring practices, which can be adopted and adapted by Member States.

**3. DEVELOP** guidance, materials, technologies and tools to support the setting up of safer medication use systems for reducing medication errors.

**4. ENGAGE** key stakeholders, partners and industry to raise awareness of the problem and actively pursue efforts to improve medication safety.

**5. EMPOWER** patients, families and their carers to become actively involved and engaged in treatment or care decisions, ask questions, spot errors and effectively manage their medicines.