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SAFER Guides will help optimize for safety

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After a lot of hard work, we have combined evidence-based guidelines with practical advice to help you use your health information technology more safely. We've been working to post the Safety Assurance Factors for EHR Resilience (SAFER) Guides since we highlighted them in our Health IT Patient Safety Action and Surveillance Plan last July.

There are nine SAFER Guides and each is designed to help care delivery organizations of all shapes and sizes conduct self-assessments of recommended practices in those areas we know are important to the safety and safe use of health information technology. The nine guides are:

- High Priority Practices
- Organizational Responsibilities
- Patient Identification
- CPOE with Decision Support
- Test Results Review and Follow-up
- Clinician Communication
- Contingency Planning
- System Interfaces
- System Configuration

As a family physician who has worked for years on making sure that health information technology is leveraged to improve the safety and quality of health care, I'm thrilled to see the SAFER Guides fill a void: We've never before had a set of tools that care delivery organizations can use to perform self-assessments and developer customized improvement plans.

There is good evidence that health information technology improves the safety of care, especially when implemented using best practices. We've learned that there is a great deal of variability in how information technology is implemented and optimized in care delivery organizations, and this variability may account for some of the problems with the safety and reliability of health IT. These guides help enhance the likelihood that health information technology is implemented in a manner that aligns with best practice. For example, the SAFER Guide on Organization Responsibility should help the leadership of health IT enabled organizations monitor critical components of the safety and safe use of health IT and make sure that a team of people – including clinicians and safety staff within the organization, as well as health information technology developers – is continuously engaged and focused on safety.   The SAFER Guide on High Priority Practices is designed to help organizations explore where they can start to integrate health IT safety into their patient safety programs by identifying high priority, high-risk practices associated with health IT use, and then suggesting which other SAFER Guides might help.

The SAFER Guides on [Contingency Planning](#) (which focuses on avoiding and recovering from downtimes), [System Interfaces](#), and [System Configuration](#) should help organizations ensure that the health IT is safely designed, maintained, and configured, is reliably available, and that the information therein is accurate and current within established expectations when each clinician uses it to care for patients.

The SAFER Guides on [Patient Identification](#), [CPOE with Decision Support](#), [Test Results Review and Follow-up](#), and [Clinician Communication](#) will help practices establish systems that will allow them to be more confident that vital clinical information on the right patient will successfully reach clinicians who need it.

ONC and AHRQ, our partner in developing health IT safety tools, research and education, will reach out to organizations and associations to encourage wider use of the SAFER Guides. We hope every sector of the health care industry will consider how they can make the SAFER Guides their own, including tailoring the content to their particular setting, specialty and priorities. We look forward to feedback and hope everyone involved with health IT will consider how they can use the SAFER Guides to work on what must be a fundamental commitment and priority – using health IT to make patient care safer.

Available at:

http://www.healthit.gov/buzz-blog/electronic-health-and-medical-records/safer-guides-optimize-safety/