

# Enhancing Patient Safety and Patient-Centered Care Through Patient and Family Engagement in Hospitals

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## Introduction

Patient safety remains a pressing global concern, with millions of preventable adverse events occurring annually, particularly in low-income and middle-income countries. This perspective review highlights the critical role of Patient and Family Engagement (PFE) in enhancing patient safety and advancing patient-centered care in hospital settings. Drawing on global frameworks such as the WHO Global Patient Safety Action Plan 2021–2030 and national policies from countries including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Indonesia, this article underscores the ethical and practical imperatives of involving patients and families as active partners in care. Evidence shows that PFE improve communication, reduce hospital readmissions, enhance treatment adherence, and contribute to better health outcomes. Despite its proven benefits, PFE remains underutilized owing to systemic barriers such as hierarchical communication, limited staff training, and cultural norms. This article calls for a multidimensional approach to embed PFE into hospital practices, including policy reform, education, and leadership support. Future research is recommended to explore practical strategies for implementing PFE and engage all stakeholders in fostering safer, more responsive healthcare systems

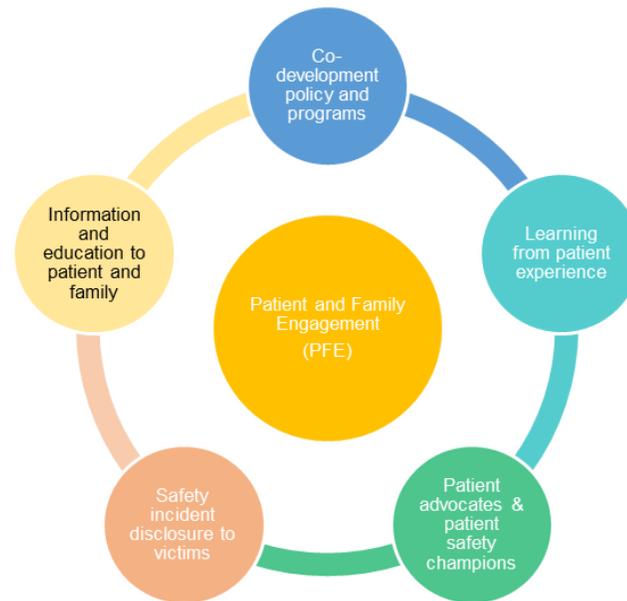
In recent decades, patient safety has emerged as a critical focus of the global healthcare system. The issue gained widespread recognition after the release of the influential report *'To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System'* by the Institute of Medicine in 2000. This report revealed the alarming frequency of preventable adverse events in U.S. hospitals, estimating that medical errors contributed to approximately 98,000 deaths annually (Donaldson et al., 2021). Building on this momentum, the World Health Organization (WHO) published data in 2004 from several countries, including the United States, England, Denmark, and Australia, revealing hospital adverse event rates ranging from 3.2% to 16.6% (Indonesia's Ministry of Health 2015). More recently, the WHO (2023a) reported that unsafe hospital care in low- and middle-income countries leads to approximately 134 million adverse events and an estimated 2.6 million deaths each year. These figures underscore the ongoing and urgent need to strengthen worldwide patient safety systems.

### **Patient and Family Engagement: A Key Strategy in Global Patient Safety Efforts**

To reduce the risk of adverse events in healthcare facilities, the WHO has launched the Global Patient Safety Action Plan 2021–2030, which consists of seven objectives and a guide for the implementation of patient safety systems (WHO, 2021). The objectives are as follows: 1) embedding a mindset of zero avoidable harm for key and related stakeholders; 2) establishing highly reliable healthcare systems and organizations that consistently safeguard patients from harm; 3) ensuring the safety of every clinical procedure, integrating safety checks and quality standards into all aspects of patient care; 4) actively involving and empowering patients and their families as partners in the journey toward safer healthcare, recognizing their vital role in identifying risks and improving outcomes; 5) educating, supporting, and protecting healthcare workers, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and environment needed to design and deliver safe care; 6) promoting continuous learning and information sharing to reduce risks, minimize preventable harm, and drive improvements in care safety; and 7) fostering sustained collaboration across sectors and nations, building partnerships, and solidarity to advance patient safety and healthcare quality globally (WHO, 2021).

Among these seven objectives, the World Health Organization (WHO) has emphasized the importance of involving patients and their families as active partners in healthcare delivery as its fourth strategic goal. Such an emphasis highlights the need to shift from a provider-centric to a patient-centered model of care. In 2023, the World Patient Safety Day centered on the theme “*Engaging patients for patient safety*,” accompanied by the slogan “*Elevate the voice of patients!*”. The campaign aimed to mobilize a wide range of stakeholders, including patients, families, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and advocacy groups, to work collaboratively in shaping healthcare policies and safety interventions (WHO, 2023b). The goal was to ensure that these efforts genuinely reflected the needs, preferences, and experiences of patients, thereby strengthening the safety and quality of care worldwide. To accomplish this strategic goal, five actions can be taken: collaboration on policy and program development, gaining insights from patient experiences, assigning and engaging patient advocates and safety champions, communicating safety incidents to those affected, and providing information and education to patients and their families (see Figure 1) (WHO, 2021).

Countries worldwide have begun integrating PFE into their national safety strategies. For example, the United States promotes patient engagement through initiatives led by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), such as the “Guide to Patient and Family Engagement in Hospital Quality and Safety” (AHRQ, 2023). Similarly, the United Kingdom’s National Health Service (NHS) encourages the co-production of care and shared decision-making as part of its patient safety strategy (NHS, 2024). In Australia, the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) standards require healthcare organizations to partner with consumers in the design and evaluation of services (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2021). In Indonesia, PFE has become a national standard for hospital accreditation (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2024), aligning with international hospital accreditation standards (Joint Commission International, 2024). These global efforts reflect a growing consensus that meaningful patient and family engagement in hospital patient safety initiatives is not only ethical, but also essential for achieving safer, higher-quality care.



**Figure 1.** WHO’s Implementation Strategies for the Strategic Objective 4: Patient and Family Engagement (Adapted from the Global Patient Safety Action Plan 2021–2030 (WHO, 2021))

### **The Impact of Patient and Family Engagement on Patient-Centered Care and Safer Healthcare Outcomes**

Engaging patients and their families during hospitalization has been proven to be a critical component of care quality, particularly within the framework of patient-centered care (PCC). Research shows that when families are actively involved, communication improves, care becomes more continuous, and outcomes are more satisfactory for both patients and providers (Woldring et al. 2025). This involvement not only supports emotional well-being, but also strengthens the preparedness of informal caregivers for post-discharge responsibilities, aligning with the principles of PCC. Another study also found that when families are actively involved in a patient’s care during hospitalization, it can lead to fewer readmissions, shorter hospital stays, better ability to carry out daily activities, less emotional stress for both patients and their families, and a higher quality of life and satisfaction for family caregivers (Bloemberg et al., 2025).

In terms of patient safety, PFE have emerged as a vital strategy for enhancing the safety of healthcare services. With firsthand experience of the patient's condition or illness journey, the opinions and viewpoints of the patient and their families are highly valuable for improving patient safety (Abdi et al., 2024; Busch et al., 2021; Seyfulayeva et al., 2025). According to previous research, patient engagement yields significant results, including saving lives, indicating the potential for a 15% decrease in injuries and resulting in substantial cost savings due to injuries from unsafe care (Slawomirski & Klazinga, 2022; WHO, 2024). Engaging patients and their families in care processes not only empowers them but also enhances communication, reduces errors, and improves health outcomes (Giap & Park, 2018; Giap & Park, 2021). Research has shown that when patients are actively involved in their care, they are more likely to identify potential

safety risks, adhere to treatment plans, and contribute to shared decision making (Sarkhosh et al., 2022).

### **Current Implementation and Future Direction**

In hospital settings, patient and family engagement can take many forms, from involving patients in bedside handovers and safety checklists to encouraging them to speak up about concerns or discrepancies in care. Family members play a critical role in monitoring care and ensuring continuity and safety (Alcindor & Cadet, 2021; Ljungholm et al., 2022). For example, patients and their families can participate in monitoring hand hygiene practices of healthcare professionals to help prevent infections. This practice aligns with one of the six International Patient Safety Goals (IPSGs), which have become global standards in healthcare facilities (Joint Commission International, 2025). Taking the example of hand hygiene compliance among nurses in Indonesia, two studies found that compliance remained below the World Health Organization's recommended standard of  $\geq 85\%$  (Prayuda & Tombong, 2024; Sagita et al., 2019). To improve safety practices, Ringdal et al. (2017) suggested that patients and their families can remind healthcare providers to perform hand hygiene if they forget. This example highlights the essential role that patients and their families play in promoting patient safety.

Despite its proven benefits, patient and family engagement remains underutilized in many healthcare systems. Barriers, such as hierarchical communication, lack of training for staff, and cultural norms that discourage questioning authority, often hinder meaningful involvement (Determeijer et al., 2024). Addressing these challenges requires a shift in institutional culture, supported by policies, education, and leadership commitment, to foster a truly patient-centered approach to safety.

To support this premise, several studies have explored both the implementation of PFE and the constraints that limit its effectiveness. Giap and Park (2021) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions that actively involve patients and families to promote patient safety. Their findings revealed that such interventions significantly improved safety outcomes, including reductions in adverse events, enhanced adherence to treatment plans, and improved communication between patients and healthcare providers. Common strategies include patient education, encouraging patients to voice concerns, involving families in care planning, and using safety tools that incorporate patient input. Despite these benefits, this study also identified persistent barriers to meaningful engagement, such as hierarchical communication structures, insufficient staff training, and cultural norms that discourage questioning authority (Giap & Park, 2021). Similarly, Handayani et al. (2025) suggested that while progress has been made, enhancing patient and family engagement requires a multidimensional approach involving education, staff training, system-level policies, community collaboration, and adequate hospital management support. Further research is needed to better understand and overcome existing barriers, including low health literacy and financial constraints (Handayani et al., 2025).

Based on this discussion, this study strongly recommends research on the practical aspects of PFE implementation. The findings of future research will contribute to existing knowledge on patient safety, specifically on the optimal engagement of patients and their families in achieving patient safety goals. On a practical level, the findings may guide healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, and other allied healthcare professionals/healthcare providers, to better engage with patients and their families in their healthcare, which in turn can lead to the improvement of healthcare

safety. Future research should also focus on involving policymakers, healthcare facility leaders, healthcare personnel, civil society, and other stakeholders in an effort to engage patients and families in safe healthcare policies and practices. Conducting research on practical PFE programs and their practicability within hospitals will eventually help to achieve and support the attainment of patient safety goals in a wide range of healthcare facilities. Therefore, as healthcare systems continue to evolve, embedding family engagement into routine hospital practices is essential to achieve safer, more responsive, and patient-centered care.

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