

Interview with Commission Board Chair Lewis McCoy

Q: How did you come to be on the board of the Patient Safety Commission?

A: I have been on the board since its inception. I was fortunate enough to work with one of the framers of the legislation who knew of my interest in patient safety. She described the voluntary framework which spans several key health care constituencies - one of which being long term care - and I immediately applied for the board. To be in on the ground-floor of a commission dedicated to improving safety in and between health care institutions was compelling; I couldn't resist. The commission represented a new way of thinking about patient safety, a voluntary approach, a focus on the consumer, and a multi-stakeholder table. It remains a unique and key player in a state that is focusing on improving the health care continuum for all Oregonians.



Q: What (or who) do you think of when you think about “patient safety”? What drives you to continue serving on the Commission?

A: When I think "patient safety", I think about the people I serve every day in our nursing facility. Each one of them entrusts their care to our staff. These people are the most obvious component in providing quality services and patient safety. But even more, it is our systems and processes that ensure our residents remain safe. I am continually driven to help our profession support the good work of the talented people whose calling it is to care for senior adults. By working on the overall system of healthcare, rather than scapegoating, we will continue to define ourselves as leaders of quality and safety.

Q: How do you think Oregon “measures up” nationally in terms of patient safety? What are our strengths, weaknesses, challenges? What can we hope for?

A: The national landscape for patient safety efforts is varied, but in general, safe health care practices are on everyone's radar screens. We stand to learn from other states' efforts, which will allow us to be more efficient in our work and avoid reinventing the wheel. That said, however, no other state is further ahead in their efforts to improve safety across various health care groups; rather, states' methods of improving patient safety are simply different. We believe that our voluntary system will prove to be a sensible way to allow providers to be accountable to consumers, while avoiding additional regulatory burdens. There is wisdom in this approach and to date health care providers have agreed with it. This voluntary approach is not perfect, but it

has already proven to be a method by which providers can report events and support true learning from our collective experiences. My belief is that as we continue to provide a safe and structured system for error reporting, we will only strengthen our safe practices by encouraging open and honest communication.

Q: How can patients, residents, families and friends help make their time in our health care facilities safer? What would you recommend to your own family and friends who are anticipating hospital stays, surgical procedures, or residence in nursing homes?

A: As we all know, it is favorable to be a team player and not to rock the boat. All of us generally try to get along with others and most of us feel some level of discomfort with confrontation. Confrontation is especially difficult when we are dealing with someone in a position of power or authority. While we trust and honor our health care professionals, we sometimes don't understand them or even disagree with them. In addition, they are people too, and people as we know, can sometimes make mistakes. The authority of the health care professional, coupled with a desire to be a "good patient" can make speaking up difficult, even for the bravest of souls. My recommendation to both consumers and professional staff is to allow for a time of questions and answers, a time for reflection, and a time for coming together as colleagues. When we are able to invite the consumer to the table as a part of the "team", and consumers recognize their important role as self-advocate, we will truly allow for a dialogue that will increase safety at that very moment in time! To consumers, *Speak up! We'll listen.* To professional health care staff, *Add a seat at your team meeting for the consumer.* This is the first step in improving patient safety in Oregon.