



## THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1200 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

JAN 30 2002

Honorable Bob Stump  
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-6035

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased to provide you this report on notification of persons affected by unanticipated adverse outcomes of medical care as directed by the Senate Armed Services Committee Report (106-292).

The Military Health System has been actively involved for many years in developing and implementing innovative approaches to improve patient safety. Our work in this vital area increased following the Institute of Medicine's November 1999 report, To Err is Human. We have been working closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the other agencies who make up the Quality Interagency Coordination Task Force on a number of initiatives to improve patient safety.

On August 16, 2001, the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs), signed a Department of Defense Instruction, "The Patient Safety Program in the Military Health System." That instruction forms the basis of a patient safety program that will involve every hospital and clinic in the Department of Defense. One of the key features of the program is our voluntary reporting program, which is modeled on the system used by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The system is designed to find and solve system and process problems before they cause harm to patients. A six month pilot test of the system began on October 6, 2000, at the National Naval Medical Center, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Fort Meade, Fort Belvoir, and Nellis Air Force Base. Each military treatment facility in the program conducts an analysis of adverse events and serious "near misses." The results of these analyses and other reviews are reported to the Military Health System Patient Safety Center at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP). The Center analyzes aggregate data to find problems and trends that might not be detected at any single facility. AFIP also provides feedback to the facilities about system and process problems and solutions. We began the rollout of the Patient Safety Program to involve all of our military treatment facilities in August 2001.

The Instruction requires each facility to "provide guidance to staff to assure that in cases in which serious medical errors cause harm to a patient, a qualified health care provider will inform the patient or appropriate family members." Good clinical care and ethical practice require health care providers to discuss these errors with patients and their families.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON

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An error reporting process and frank discussions with patients and families are essential parts of the Patient Safety Program, but the program also involves several other initiatives that seek to prevent errors from occurring. The Breakthrough Series on Reducing Errors in High Hazard Areas involves nineteen DoD teams along with teams from VA, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the Healthcare Financing Administration in reducing errors in intensive care units, emergency departments, labor and delivery and operating rooms. The Healthcare Team Coordination Training Program reduces errors by using principles developed in military and civilian aviation to improve communication and teamwork. The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences is developing a curriculum and methods for teaching medical students, physicians, nurses and other healthcare professionals to reduce errors. Other DoD programs outside the Patient Safety Program such as the Pharmacy Data Transaction Service and Comprehensive Health Care System data system (CHCS II) are also increasing the safety of our patients and the quality of care they receive.

Thank you for your continued support of the Military Health System.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Winkenwerder, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

William Winkenwerder, Jr., MD

cc:

Honorable Ike Skelton  
Ranking Democrat