

WHAT CAN IOWANS DO WHEN EXPERIENCING A MEDICAL ERROR?

In Iowa¹ and nationally², patients who experience a medical error will report it because they want to prevent the same error from happening to someone else in the future. They trust that by reporting the error, the medical provider who was responsible will proactively address and fix the problem. Patients wish to take a bad and harmful situation and convert it into a positive experience for other patients.

If you feel that you or a family member or friend have experienced a medical error during care at a hospital or physician office, it is important to speak up and report the error to the provider who is responsible. It is quite possible that your healthcare provider may be unaware of your concern and may be in the best position to help address your medical situation. In Iowa, only four in 10 patients who experienced a medical error learned of it from the healthcare provider. For those patients who were not told of the error, or did not report the error to the responsible provider, the top reason for not reporting the error was the patient did not think it would do any good. Other reasons for not reporting the error were that Iowans did not think they could report an error for someone else or did not know how to report the error.

It is important for patients and family members to understand that responsible providers will welcome feedback and thank patients who ask questions and report safety issues when problems occur. By becoming aware of an unsafe situation, healthcare providers should minimize the risk to others and ensure the situation is adequately addressed.

If a medical error occurs, who should you report the error to?³

- Begin with the medical provider responsible for your care – or a member of your healthcare team.
- If in a hospital setting, ask to speak with the unit nurse manager, your attending physician, or a patient advocate employed by the hospital. Under federal law, patients have a right "to be informed of the hospital's internal grievance process, including whom to contact to file a grievance."
- If you are dissatisfied with the response, ask to speak to the chief patient safety officer, the chief medical officer, the chief nursing officer, or the chief executive of the hospital or clinic.
- In a physician's office setting, ask to speak to your physician or the practice manager – or patient relations liaison in a large clinic.

Filing a Formal Complaint⁴

If you feel that the process of reporting the medical error to the responsible organization was unsatisfactory, you may choose to go beyond the facility or physician's practice and contact the accrediting body of the facility responsible for your medical error. Share your concerns and ask how they can assist you.

1. **The Joint Commission** – accredits hospitals, medical centers and other facilities.
(https://www.jointcommission.org/report_a_complaint.aspx)
2. **DNV-GL Healthcare** – accredits hospitals in the U.S. and overseas.
(<https://www.dnvglhealthcare.com/patient-complaint-report>)

Additionally, depending on the nature of your complaint, you may choose to contact the following Iowa organizations:

- Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals (<https://dia.iowa.gov/contact-form>)
- Iowa Board of Registration in Medicine: Iowa Board of Medicine (<https://medicalboard.iowa.gov/services/ComplaintForm.html>)
- Iowa Board of Registration in Nursing: Iowa Board of Nursing (<https://www.ncsbn.org/Iowa.htm>)
- Iowa Board of Pharmacy (<https://nabp.pharmacy/boards-of-pharmacy/iowa/>)
- Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, Inc.
(<http://www.aaahc.org/en/my-care/Feedback-about-an-accredited-organization/>)

¹ Heartland Health Research Institute. *Iowa Patient Safety Study: Iowans' Views on Medical Errors* © 2017

² NORC at the University of Chicago and IHI/NPSF Lucian Leape Institute. (2017) *Americans' Experiences with Medical Errors and Views on Patient Safety*. Pages 13-15. CHICAGO, IL.

³ National Patient Safety Foundation.

⁴ Unfortunately, there is no standardized method or central repository that collects the patient perspective on medical harm, either in Iowa or nationally.

