

Education and Training



■ ■ ■ **Technical Series on Safer Primary Care**

Education and Training: Technical Series on Safer Primary Care
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Preface

Safer Primary Care

Health services throughout the world strive to provide care to people when they are unwell and assist them to stay well. Primary care services are increasingly at the heart of integrated people-centred health care in many countries. They provide an entry point into the health system, ongoing care coordination and a person-focused approach for people and their families. Accessible and safe primary care is essential to achieving universal health coverage and to supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which prioritize healthy lives and promote well-being for all.

Health services work hard to provide safe and high quality care, but sometimes people are inadvertently harmed. Unsafe health care has been recognized as a global challenge and much has been done to understand the causes, consequences and potential solutions to this problem. However, the majority of this work up to now has focused on hospital care and there is, as a result, far less understanding about what can be done to improve safety in primary care.

Provision of safe primary care is a priority. Understanding the magnitude and nature of harm in primary care is important because most health care is now offered in this setting. Every day, millions of people across the world use primary care services. Therefore, the potential and necessity to reduce harm is very considerable. Good primary care may lead to fewer avoidable hospitalizations, but unsafe primary care can cause avoidable illness and injury, leading to unnecessary hospitalizations, and in some cases, disability and even death.

Implementing system changes and practices are crucial to improve safety at all levels of health care. Recognizing the paucity of accessible information on primary care, World Health Organization (WHO) set up a Safer Primary Care Expert Working Group. The Working Group reviewed the literature, prioritized areas in need of further research and compiled a set of nine monographs which cover selected priority technical topics. WHO is publishing this technical series to make the work of these distinguished experts available to everyone with an interest in *Safer Primary Care*.

The aim of this technical series is to provide a compendium of information on key issues that can impact safety in the provision of primary health care. It does not propose a “one-size-fits-all” approach, as primary care is organized in different ways across countries and also often in different ways within a given country. There can be a mix of larger primary care or group services with shared resources and small services with few staff and resources. Some countries have primary care services operating within strong national support systems, while in other countries it consists mainly of independent private practices that are not linked



or well-coordinated. The approach to improving safety in primary care, therefore, needs to consider applicability in each country and care setting.

This technical series covers the following topics:

Patients

- Patient engagement

Health workforce

- Education and training
- Human factors

Care processes

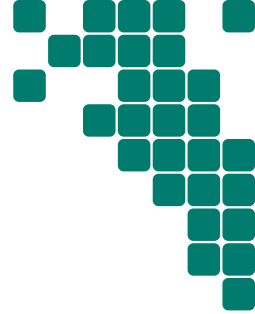
- Administrative errors
- Diagnostic errors
- Medication errors
- Multimorbidity
- Transitions of care

Tools and technology

- Electronic tools

WHO is committed to tackling the challenges of patient safety in primary care, and is looking at practical ways to address them. It is our hope that this technical series of monographs will make a valuable and timely contribution to the planning and delivery of safer primary care services in all WHO Member States.





1 Introduction

1.1 Scope

The health workforce is an essential component of safer primary care. To provide safe, high quality primary care, necessary educational qualifications, good training and ongoing professional development are paramount.

There is an increasing recognition of the importance of improving safety, but health care education may lag behind. Health care workers do their best to provide safe care, but they need the skills and resources to identify risk and reduce harm. This is why it is important to take a systematic approach to providing education about improving safety in primary care.

This monograph describes key characteristics for consideration by the World Health Organization (WHO) Member States to support safer primary care when developing or reviewing the education and training of health care workers.

After outlining the approach taken to compile information, the monograph describes why examining provider education is important. It then identifies key issues that may hinder education and offers potential solutions with examples of content that could be included in the curricula of education courses. The term “education” is used throughout to include education and training. The term “provider” is used to mean various categories of health care workers.

1.2 Approach

To compile information for this monograph, WHO sought the advice of experts in the field recommended by the Safer Primary Care Expert Working Group and reviewed relevant research, the published literature and educational curricula.

International experts in delivering safe primary care provided feedback, examples of strategies that have worked well around the world and practical suggestions about potential priorities for countries for improving the safety of primary care services.



2 Education and training

There are many reasons why it is essential to examine education when striving for safer primary care. Key reasons include:

- providing education about the core principles of primary care to all health care providers creates a foundation of values upon which to develop a positive safety culture;
- having an adequate and well-trained primary care health workforce is essential for providing safe, high quality care;
- educating the workforce about safety skills has the potential to further improve patient outcomes.

Primary care is guided by eight core principles: access or first-contact care; comprehensiveness; continuity of care; coordination; prevention; family orientation; community orientation; and person-centredness (1). WHO has identified that applying these principles is key to providing high quality health care globally (2). Ensuring that the core characteristics of primary care are included in the education process of all health care workers will help to build a health care culture where safety and quality are valued because they are central to patient well-being.

Efforts to improve safety must include educating the workforce. The composition of the primary care workforce varies substantially by setting. However, regardless of the structure of the primary care workforce, pre-service and in-service education enhances the safety and quality of care by ensuring that individuals are well prepared to perform their required duties, thereby reducing errors due to gaps in knowledge or skills.

3 Types of education

This section briefly outlines various types of education for providers and why they are important. It is important to review what type of education is available and identify any gaps in provision.

The main types of education that may support safer primary care include:

- undergraduate and postgraduate pre-service education for trainee providers;
- in-service education programmes for practising providers;
- patient education and awareness raising.

This monograph covers the education of providers, but it acknowledges that the education and awareness raising of patients as key members of care teams are equally important.

3.1 Pre-service education

Pre-service education for professionals occurs before they are qualified as health care providers. The safety of primary care can be strengthened by ensuring good quality pre-service education in technical skills, preventive care, diagnostics, therapeutics and palliative care.

Infusing primary care principles into pre-service education for all health professionals would provide a shared cultural background and promote a coordinated team-based approach toward achieving safety for all. Interactions with trained primary care providers early in pre-service education would give exposure to trainees and allow for on-the-job training in a conducive learning environment.

Equally important are postgraduate level education courses and training programmes, including those leading to a qualification as a specialist in primary care. In some areas, basic primary care services are delivered without a postgraduate

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