Piloting OR Safety

Aviation and medicine both require professionals to hold peoples' lives in their hands. Now, study findings hint that hospitals may improve patient safety by drawing on aviation-type safety initiatives. When medicine “turns its eyes to the sky,” patient safety on the ground may improve, offered Dr. Harry C. Sax of Brown University in an interview with Reuters.

Pre-flight checklists and non-punitive incident reporting are measures that significantly minimize aviation accidents, Sax and colleagues point out in their study, published in *Archives of Surgery* which assesses how hospital staff at a 722-bed university hospital and a 247-bed community hospital implemented and felt about similar safety initiatives.

The hospitals trained 857 hospital staff with the “Lessons from the Cockpit” training course as one of their safety initiatives. The course highlights team safety-enhancing efforts used in aviation and how similar efforts may benefit other industries. Immediate post-training surveys revealed that staff members were more willing to commit themselves to team efforts to improve patient safety and effectively confront their own mistakes, as well as those of other technicians, nurses and physicians.

Additional surveys, completed a minimum of two months after training, hinted that staff maintained their sense of personal empowerment in regards to patient safety initiatives.

Sax and colleagues found that the use of pre-surgery checklists increased from 75 percent in 2003 to 100 percent in 2007 in hospitals that utilized the training course. Moreover, the community hospital that additionally implemented a web-based, self-reporting incident and error system saw a marked increase in the self-reporting of errors.

The researchers continue to collect information to better determine which aspects of the course maintain their impact over one-year and which specific measures yield the most benefit in terms of increased patient safety.

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