

# Europe boosts patient safety measures

By Mia Burns

Europe is at the forefront of acknowledging the importance of patient safety and risk management, according to Frost & Sullivan. Eight to 10 percent of patients in the region are subjected to healthcare-associated infections and medication or prescription errors. In addition, about 30 to 40 percent of these issues are preventable, and healthcare institutions have rolled out several initiatives for reporting and learning systems, as well as patient safety directives. Specifically, Denmark has shown considerable progress with the United Kingdom and France following closely behind.

“Early efforts in patient safety in healthcare systems in Denmark were initiated with the Danish adverse event study in September 2001 and Danish society for patient safety was constituted in December 2001 to cope with the high prevalence of adverse events being reported in the country,” says Shruthi Parakkal, research analyst, healthcare, Frost & Sullivan. “Ever since, Danish society for patient safety has been spearheading the patient safety efforts, through establishment of Danish act on patient safety in 2003, national learning and reporting systems in 2004 and LINNEAUS Euro-PC project(2009-2013) for improving patient safety in primary care sector. The progress in patient safety space in Denmark can be attributed to the systematic and organized way of approaching the issue and building systems which have a high engagement of the various stakeholders in healthcare environment. For instance, Denmark’s patient safety policies are one of the few in Europe, which involves participation from primary/generalist care and patients in reporting of safety issues.”

Frost & Sullivan has released new analysis, **Patient Safety and Risk Management in the United Kingdom, Denmark and France** indicating that European Union member states have identified 13 directives for patient safety. Nine states including the United Kingdom, Denmark, and France have implemented 10 to 12 recommendations, which are expected to be fully enforced by 2015. The European Union’s aim to digitally enable its healthcare system by completely transitioning from a paper documentation system to electronic health records by 2020 will bring its vision of a safe environment for patients to fruition.

Regarding the 13 directives for patient safety, Parakkal told *Med Ad News Daily*, “The European Union council has a set of directives towards enhancing the patient safety focus in Europe. These directives have the goal of establishment of proper reporting and learning systems for recording adverse events, creating awareness among the patients and citizens regarding the safety standards, promoting a culture of safety, and giving proper training and education to healthcare workers. Furthermore, these directives are intended at encouraging collaboration at a community, regional, and country level for sharing the best practices and knowledge on improving the safety standards, and to encourage research in this field to help reduce the incidences of adverse events.”

The 10 to 12 recommendations for patient safety concern a wide range of areas, according to Parakkal. “The main areas covered under the 10 to 12 recommendations are prioritizing patient safety as a major focus area in public health policies, assigning an authority in charge for patient safety, development of patient safety standards, strategies and programs, establishment of reporting and learning systems, involvement of patients by giving information about patient safety to them and encourage them to actively participate in reporting the adverse events,” she told *Med Ad News Daily*. “The nine countries that have implemented between 10 to 12 recommendations include Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, and the implementation of all the recommendations is expected to be complete by 2015.”

The company claims that healthcare IT vendors have already recognized patient safety solutions as a potential high-growth segment. The vendors are tailoring patient safety into existing IT healthcare solutions, such as electronic health

records, and extending their portfolio to include solutions solely aimed at tackling patient safety challenges.

"The European Commission is highly focused on digitally enabling its healthcare system by completely transitioning from the paper documentation system to the implementation of the electronic health records by 2020," says Parakkal. "This is part of the e-health strategy of the European Commission and the regional healthcare IT implementation guidelines followed by the European Union member states. Transition to electronic health records by 2020, is not a part of Pharma 2020, as the latter focuses on pharmaceutical and life sciences industry, with the aim of investing in research and innovation such that there is improved R&D outcomes at lesser costs. However, electronic health records by 2020 and Pharma 2020 are not entirely mutually exclusive, as both the programs would benefit from the improvements generated by each other in the healthcare space."

In her analysis, Parakkal indicated that patient involvement will become crucial in decreasing safety problems. "Patient engagement and involvement can help reduce the safety issues to a large extent by encouraging them to report the safety issues," she told *Med Ad News Daily*. "This can help analyze the patient experiences and views on safety issues, and can be used for formulating the safety standards in a holistic way. It is seen that engaging patients actively in disease management can improve the clinical outcomes and help in increasing efficiency and quality of care. Hence, patient involvement is extremely important especially as the healthcare market is gradually shifting from physician centric approach to a patient centric one wherein patients will have an active role in the healthcare decision making framework."

However, the organizational culture in several healthcare facilities and hospitals does not favor the publishing of data related to their performance, thereby hampering patient safety efforts at large. Also, most patient safety plans focus on hospitals, with very little emphasis on extending the safety culture to primary and generalist care, or to patients reporting safety incidents.

"Majority of the hospitals have a rigid organizational culture with less transparency, stemming from the traditional method of keeping the patient data and related performance indicators on patient safety to themselves, thereby restricting the collaboration and knowledge sharing in the medical fraternity," says Parakkal. "As a result, it not only restricts the sharing of relevant patient information, but also acts as a roadblock to establishing patient safety standards. Organizational culture change is a long-incremental effort and requires complete buy in from the management side, as the leadership team can use a trickle down approach to spread the message of patient safety from top to bottom of the organizational pyramid. Furthermore, the hospitals have to focus on encouraging their employees to report patient safety issues, thereby reducing the incidences of adverse events and safety lapses."

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