



Speaking Up for Safety programme in practice

KK WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) is a tertiary referral centre for Obstetrics, Gynaecology, Paediatrics and Neonatology, specialising in high-risk conditions for women and children in Singapore.

In 2016, Target Zero Harm by 2022 became a strategic priority for KKH. One of the factors identified to reduce the risk of patient harm is staff willingness to speak up. KKH needed an organisation-wide programme to strengthen their culture of safety, and overcome human factors barriers, to achieve their target of zero patient harm.

THE CHALLENGE

KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) is Singapore's leader in healthcare for women and children, and aims to deliver safe and reliable care for their patients.

Staff willingness to speak up when they are concerned that patient harm might be about to occur, can impact safe and reliable healthcare. The barriers to speaking up at KKH included the hierarchical nature of healthcare and a culture in Asia of respecting seniority and those with more experience. Less experienced staff feared speaking up might be perceived as disrespect and ignored, or seen as undermining the efficiency of the team.

THE SOLUTION

The **Speaking Up for Safety™ programme** helped KKH overcome entrenched behaviours and improve their safety culture. The programme's sustainable, organisation-wide framework empowers staff to support each other and raise concerns in a respectful, collegiate manner.

Speaking Up for Safety is delivered as a licensed train-the-trainer model, which enables the organisation to achieve culture change from within. KKH were able to build the internal capability to change their culture and train their staff, normalising respectful two-way communication that helps to prevent unintended patient harm.

The programme uses the Safety C.O.D.E., a graded model for standardising language when communicating concern. This model balances patient safety with respect, resulting in a culture where KKH staff are now comfortable to 'check' each other and welcome being 'checked' by others.

Type

Public; Obstetrics, Gynaecology, Paediatrics, Neonatology, 830 bed hospital

Region

Singapore

Employees

5,591+



KK Women's and
Children's Hospital
SingHealth

THE PROGRAMME IN PRACTICE — KKH'S APPROACH

A dedicated Patient Safety team from KKH's Quality, Safety and Risk Management Department worked with Cognitive Institute to implement the Speaking Up for Safety programme. Respected colleagues from multiple disciplines were selected and accredited by Cognitive Institute to deliver the Speaking Up for Safety seminar to staff.

The programme was delivered to all staff, and implementation began with senior leaders, then middle management, followed by frontline staff. Each department had a Patient Safety Lead, responsible for promoting and reinforcing safety awareness in their unit. This framework, collaboration and commitment to communication are key towards achieving zero harm.

KKH embedded the speaking up messages using video, visual aids, digital communications and town hall sessions. They encourage positive behaviour and celebrate 'good catches' with Patient Safety Awards each month. This creates learning opportunities for staff to proactively manage incidences before they occur.

PROGRAMME RESULTS

The Speaking Up for Safety one hour presentation was delivered to 97% of staff, including visiting consultants, over a six month period. KKH achieved this by running a large number of sessions at varying times to accommodate staff shifts. Speaking Up for Safety training is now compulsory for all new and visiting staff.

The Safety C.O.D.E. is recognised by KKH staff as common language to respectfully raise issues with colleagues when they are concerned about patient safety. Every member of KKH staff from the most senior clinician to the most junior nurse use it as a guide to assert their concern when they feel the first conversation did not get the intended result.

A Patient Safety Culture Survey using the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) tool indicated an increase from 49.5% in 2010 to 81.2% in 2018 in staff willingness to speak up to prevent patient harm.

KKH believe their speaking up culture has contributed to the following outcomes.

INCIDENT FREE DAYS

Zero for 1260 days
wrong site surgery

Zero for 604 days
Methicillin resistant
Staphylococcus Aureus
Infections (**MRSA**)

Zero for 365 days
Catheter associated urinary
tract infection (**CAUTI**) -
Children's Intensive Care Unit

Zero for 590 days
Ventilator associated
Pneumonia (**VAP**) -
Children's Intensive Care Unit



A safe culture is when staff speak up if there are safety concerns, identifying unsafe practices, being **accountable** to the choices they make, and building trust by having a **psychologically safe environment** to speak up.

Ms Pang Nguk Lan
Chief Risk Officer,
KK Women's and Children's Hospital

KKH'S TOP 4 SUCCESS FACTORS

1. Leadership support upfront

KKH overcame initial reservations quickly and effectively by engaging and securing leadership support upfront. Leadership continue to reinforce advocacy for the programme at town hall meetings and events, and in videos and publications.

2. Consistent and repeated communication

Leadership and middle management deliver a consistent Speaking Up for Safety message using a standardised “communication kit”, developed by KKH Corporate Communications in collaboration with the Quality, Safety and Risk Management Department.

One of the ways KKH encourage and reinforce the Speaking Up message is with their Patient Safety Awards. The Awards recognise and share “stories” of staff using the Safety C.O.D.E. to avoid patient harm.

3. Speaking Up for Safety as a strategic priority

Target Zero Harm and the Speaking Up for Safety Commitment became a strategic patient safety priority for KKH and was important for securing support from all staff.

4. A psychologically safe environment to speak up and listen up

KKH discovered many staff did not speak up if they were not certain if a patient may be harmed. Using video, leadership reassured staff that it was “ok to be unsure” and senior management would support them “even if they turned out to be wrong”. They reinforced that the Safety C.O.D.E. message will be welcomed by receivers as “we’re all on the same team”.



The Safety C.O.D.E. has become **standard language** for raising safety concerns in a respectful manner.

Dr Alvin Chang

Clinical Director

Quality, Safety and Risk Management

KK Women's and Children's Hospital



The Speaking Up for Safety programme has provided a **very good framework** to guide our staff on how to speak up **effectively**.

Prof Ng Kee Chong

Chairman, Medical Board,

KK Women's and Children's Hospital

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