2017 National Patient Safety Week

March 12-18, 2017 is National Patient Safety Week that recognizes the ongoing efforts to improve patient safety and keep our patients from harm. While we have made significant improvements over the past 5 years in keeping patients safe, many opportunities exist for decreasing preventable harm.

Recently, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) released the National Scorecard on Rates of Hospital-Acquired Conditions 2010 to 2015. The AHRQ estimates a 20% decline in hospital-acquired conditions (HACs) such as pressure ulcers, adverse drug events, falls, and surgical site infections over the past 6 years. The report estimates that 125,000 fewer patients died as a result of improvement is patient safety. Yet, we still have so much more to do to eliminate harm. There is still a lot of preventable harm occurring every day in US hospitals and in our healthcare delivery system.

The reduction in HACs was the result of US hospitals focusing on safety improvements largely in response to the financial incentives of Medicare with payment penalties for poor performing hospitals.

With so much changing in healthcare via new payment models, new quality reporting, Medicare Payment Reform (MACRA), new care models such as bundled payments, and consolidations of health systems and physician practices, we must stay focused on patient safety. Our work at Baystate Health to improve the culture of safety by encouraging open and honest conversations about potential mistakes, transparency to patients with an apology after an adverse event, and the use of team work tools such short briefings and debriefs around clinical events is paying off for our patients and staff.

In a recent paper regarding patient safety, Dr. Don Berwick says, “Today we must not let the many competing priorities in health care divert our attention from the important goal of preventing harm to patients. On the contrary—we need to keep our eyes on the road and step on the accelerator.”

Keep up this great work. Report all medical errors in our Safety Reporting System, and keep the conversation going.

As always, I welcome your comments and suggestions at evan.benjamin@baystatehealth.org.