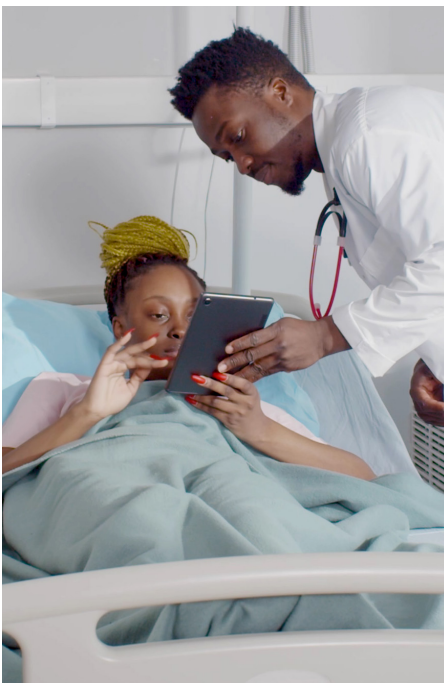


# Safe Informed Care

Providing safe and informed care to all patients is a fundamental responsibility of any healthcare system. Ensuring patients are informed, active participants in their care improves health outcomes. The provision of safe care can go beyond the walls of a hospital, and by following standards that assess patients' safety outside of the healthcare setting, hospitals can further optimize outcomes. Joint Commission's quality standards go beyond those required by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to specify and require best practices for patient-informed and safe care.

## Background

For over two decades, Joint Commission standards have helped to foster effective communication between patient and physician by outlining specific details and criteria for fully engaging patients in their care and obtaining informed consent. Joint Commission requires hospitals to communicate in a way patients can understand and sets standards for the informed consent process. Since 2004, Joint Commission has also required organizations to use written criteria to identify those patients who may be victims of physical assault, sexual assault, sexual molestation, domestic abuse, or elder or child abuse and neglect, including considering the risk and resources needed to support patients who are potentially at risk post-discharge.



## Standards

**Joint Commission patients' rights standards enhance patient protection and engagement in their care by requiring hospitals to:**

- Ensure patients receive information in a way they understand (e.g., interpretation and translation, adaptations for patients with vision, hearing, speech, or cognitive impairment) and are treated with dignity and respect
- Respect the patient's right to give or withhold informed consent (defined by written policy and following a defined process)
- Evaluate at entry to the hospital and on an on-going basis whether patients may be victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation using defined criteria and:
  - Maintaining of list of community agencies to provide care and support for referrals
  - Educating staff on recognizing and acting on possible abuse and neglect
  - Reporting internal cases of possible abuse, neglect, or exploitation
  - Providing resources to patient populations that need protective services

# Rationale

- Miscommunication can lead to medical errors, reduced adherence to treatment, and poor health outcomes.<sup>i</sup>
- When patients understand their treatment options and engage in decision-making, they are more likely to adhere to care plans and experience better outcomes.
- Respecting a patient’s cultural, spiritual, and personal values throughout the care process is foundational to enhance trust, communication, and patient engagement.
- Informed consent—a formal process of communication between a clinician and patient that results in authorization or agreement to undergo medical interventions—is a legal and ethical cornerstone of this communication process, ensuring patients understand the risks, benefits, and alternatives to treatment.<sup>ii</sup>



Hospitals are often the first point of contact for individuals experiencing abuse and neglect, making it critical to identify these potential victims. The lack of a thorough and robust process to identify trauma puts the organization at risk for missing essential information that could guide treatment decisions and impact individual outcomes. Joint Commission standards:

- Promote early screening to identify at-risk individuals and intervene before harm escalates
- Focus on getting patients, who may be potential victims, access to needed community services and resources

## Related Activities

Joint Commission publishes information about informed consent in FAQ publications: [Informed Consent — Other Practitioners or Students Performing Tasks Related to Surgery, or Examinations or Invasive Procedures.](#)

<sup>i</sup> Kwame, A, Petrucka, PM A literature-based study of patient-centered care and communication in nurse-patient interactions: barriers, facilitators, and the way forward. *BMC Nurs* 2021;20: 158. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-021-00684-2> <sup>ii</sup> Patient Safety Action Network (PSAN). Patient rights and informed consent. 2025. <https://www.patientsafetyaction.org/resources/informed-consent/>



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