
Call for More Research on Patient Safety

24 SEPTEMBER 2007 | PORTO, PORTUGAL/GENEVA -- WHO and its partners have called for increased research to improve patient safety. They emphasized the need for intensified research at an international conference that opened today in Porto, Portugal. The conference on patient safety research will examine evidence showing that harm from medical care poses a substantial burden in terms of suffering and death in Europe and around the world.

WHO estimates that tens of millions of patients worldwide endure disabling injuries or death each year, directly attributed to unsafe medical practices and care. In Europe alone, an average of one in every 10 patients admitted to hospital suffers some form of preventable harm. But more research is needed to better understand the full impact of poor patient safety.

The conference, supported by the European Commission, will promote dialogue between researchers, policy-makers and other constituencies in healthcare in Europe, and build international collaborative research networks. "Research in patient safety offers all WHO Member States a major innovative resource to assist their hospitals in avoiding harm from medical care and ensure that healthcare reduces patient suffering and does not contribute to it," said Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer for England, who chairs the WHO World Alliance for Patient Safety. "European countries now have the opportunity to translate research findings into tangible actions that can actually save lives."

The conference will build on the work of the WHO World Alliance for Patient Safety and the contribution of the participating scientists and government officials. It will offer opportunities to promote dialogue between researchers, policy-makers and other constituencies involved in healthcare in Europe. It is jointly organized by the Faculty of Public Health, (UK), University College London, and the WHO World Alliance for Patient Safety.

Much of the existing research evidence on the burden of harm in healthcare is from developed countries, although some evidence from developing nations suggests that unsafe care is a major problem there too. Research is needed not only on individual healthcare areas, but also on the underlying processes and organizational structures that contribute to unsafe care.

Areas where further research is needed include:

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