
Zoom on Profile: David B. Mayer, MD



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Dr. Mayer is the Chief Executive Officer for the Patient Safety Movement Foundation. He also serves as the Executive Director of MedStar Institute for Quality and Safety and previously served for almost seven years as MedStar Health's Vice-President for Quality and Safety. He joined MedStar from the University of Illinois Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois. Over the course of 10 years, he held numerous roles including co-executive director of the UIC Institute for Patient Safety Excellence. Dr. Mayer also founded and has led the Annual Telluride International Patient Safety Roundtable and Patient Safety Summer Camps for the last fifteen years and co-produced the patient safety educational film series titled "The Faces of Medical Error...From Tears to Transparency," which won numerous awards including the prestigious Aegis Film Society Top Short Documentary Award. Most recently, Dr. Mayer was listed on the Becker's Hospital Review 2017 and 2018 lists of Top 50 people leading patient safety. He was awarded the 2017 Patient Safety Movement Humanitarian Award. He was selected by the International Society for Quality in Healthcare (ISQua) as an International Quality and Safety Expert and has been presented with the 2013 Founders' Award from the American College of Medical Quality.

1. What are your key areas of interest and research?

My work through the years has focused on three key safety domains: (1) reducing patient harm through process and system improvements, (2) Early communication, apology and resolution programs after preventable harm, and (3) education of future healthcare leaders.

2. What are the major challenges in your field?

One major challenge is the speed at which changes typically take place in the area of patient safety. Many stakeholders don't like change and prefer the status quo. Because of that, we have lacked the urgency needed to save lives. We need to make Safety our number one priority in all our hospitals.

3. What is your top management tip?

Lead by example, create a just culture and empower every person in your team to have a voice. When an issue arises, look at "what" is responsible versus "who" is responsible. Embrace and support those caught in faulty systems or processes that led to unintentional harm. No one goes to work to harm a patient. When that happens, caregivers are devastated and need a hug from their colleagues. And have processes in place that value accountability and ownership to make things better

4. What would you single out as a career highlight?

I've been fortunate to have many highlights in my career... I was honored with the Patient Safety Movement Humanitarian award in 2017. I am also very proud to have been part of the team that worked with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to create and launch the Communication and Optimal Resolution (CANDOR) toolkit to hospitals around the world. Finally, I think I am most proud of the Telluride Patient Summer Camps I founded 15 years ago and lead each year. This year we will do four camps in the US, one in Australia and one in Qatar. Over 250 medical students, nursing students and resident physicians will go through a week long immersion on patient safety. Each go back and start helping drive change in their home institutions. We have over 1200 alumni who have gone through one of our patient safety camps.

5. If you had not chosen this career path what do you think you would have become?

I love what I do. But if I couldn't do work in patient safety, I would have wanted to play center fielder for the Chicago Cubs. I never had the talent...but we can all dream!

6. What are your personal interests outside of work?

My family, my children and my four grandchildren. Patient safety is my hobby.

7. Your favorite quote?

"Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. In reality, it is what always has." -Margaret Meade

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