

Advancing patient safety

Integrating nursing practice, professional development, and patient education



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Advancing human progress together

Patient safety depends on well-prepared nurses, informed patients, and healthy work environments

Yet, healthcare systems today face intersecting crises: many adults in the U.S. struggle with health literacy, new nurses feel unprepared for independent practice, and workplace violence is on the rise. The result is preventable harm, clinician burnout, and costly turnover.

This whitepaper presents a strategic framework for healthcare leaders to strengthen patient safety through **three integrated pillars**:

1. **Transition-to-practice excellence**—ensuring new nurse readiness through standardization, clinical immersion, and technology-driven learning.
2. **Health literacy and patient education**—transforming communication to reduce preventable errors and improve comprehension.
3. **Professional integration and workforce safety**—aligning education, teamwork, and environment to create a culture where safety thrives.

Integrated strategies offer a promising path toward improving workforce stability, clinical competency, and patient safety outcomes.



“We need to bring all of these elements together so nurses are truly prepared. When they’re aligned, they strengthen one another — ultimately leading to better patient outcomes and a more positive patient experience.”

Claire Zangerle, DNP, RN

CEO of the American Organization for Nursing Leadership and senior vice president and chief nurse executive of the American Hospital Association

The state of patient safety today

Healthcare leaders face unprecedented complexity. Fragmented approaches to nurse education, patient communication, and workforce safety are no longer sustainable.



90M

Approximately 90 million U.S. adults have limited health literacy, increasing medication errors and readmissions.¹



38%

38% of nursing graduates said their education did not adequately prepare them for independent practice.²



82%

82% of nurses reported experiencing at least one type of workplace violence in the past year, and 46% said incidents increased compared to the previous year.³

Pillar one

Strengthening the transition to practice

Bridging the readiness gap

The traditional “sink or swim” approach leaves many novice nurses underprepared. Organizations with standardized transition programs could see lower turnover and improved safety outcomes.

Strategies for readiness



Standardized orientation

Consistent onboarding protocols and competency assessments.



Mentorship programs

Trained preceptors providing structured support.



Ongoing feedback loops

Regular skill evaluation and confidence check-ins.



Specialized clinical immersion

Sustained, hands-on exposure in specialty areas drives skill mastery. Programs that include clinical immersion show a significant change in competency scores.³

Best practices

- Unit-specific orientation and simulations for high-risk scenarios.
- Longer immersion periods for complex care environments.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration during orientation.

Technology-enhanced learning

micro-learning and AI-personalized education offer scalable, flexible solutions. By integrating micro-learning into clinical development, organizations can deliver timely, targeted education that reinforces critical skills and supports knowledge retention.

When learning is accessible on demand, whether through mobile devices or embedded within workflows, nurses can more easily refresh competencies, close knowledge gaps, and apply best practices directly at the point of care. This approach not only enhances confidence and performance but also helps sustain a culture of safety and continuous learning.

Implementation tactics

- Mobile-accessible micro-learning modules.
- AI-driven adaptive learning based on progress.
- On-demand skills refreshers accessible at the point of care.



“Using technology to move toward micro-learning will really improve the care we provide.”

Tammy Purcell, MSN, RNC-OB
Clinical Nurse Executive at Elsevier

Pillar two

Elevating health literacy for safety

Patient education as a safety imperative

Low health literacy leads to medication errors, delayed care, and poor outcomes.



“There are more than 90 million adults who struggle with health literacy, putting them at risk for serious safety concerns. Nurses are often the primary communicators and educators for patients when they’re in our care. We’re in an important position to help patients improve their understanding and the confidence that they have in managing their own care at home.”

Tiffany McCauley, MSN, RN

Clinical Nurse Executive at Elsevier

Communication enhancement



Use of language

Train staff in plain-language communication.



Patient readiness

Assess patient readiness to learn and learning preferences.



Cultural awareness

Incorporate cultural competency into every patient interaction.

Technology-supported education

- Offer video, interactive, and written materials for diverse learning styles.
- Provide patient education resources aligned to where the patient is in their health journey.
- Ensure consistent, evidence-based messaging across all care team members.

Virtual nursing integration

Virtual nurses can dedicate time to discharge education and medication review while involving family members remotely.



“The tolerance for virtual care is moving from ‘I don’t want to talk to a nurse on a screen’ to ‘I kind of like that.’ It extends education beyond the bedside.”

Claire Zangerle, DNP, RN

Pillar three

Integrating nurse development and patient education

Unified approaches to education and care

New nurses often receive minimal preparation in patient communication and health literacy. Integrating these skills into early professional development creates safer, more confident professionals.

Unified training approaches

- **Embed** health literacy and teaching techniques into nurse orientation.
- **Connect** communication skills training to clinical competency.
- **Reinforce** patient education as a core safety competency.

Coordinated team-based care

- **Standardize** patient education across care teams.
- **Utilize** shared digital platforms for consistent documentation and follow-up.

Measurement and accountability

- **Track** the connection between nurse development and safety outcomes.
- **Measure** patient comprehension, adherence, and readmissions.
- **Report and review** safety indicators quarterly.

Creating safe work environments

Workplace violence, bullying, and incivility directly threaten patient safety. A healthy work environment is foundational for effective care delivery.

Policy and advocacy

- Stay informed about legislative initiatives, including the SAVE Act, designed to enhance protections for healthcare workers.
- Establish and enforce clear organizational policies that promote zero tolerance for workplace violence and incivility.

Environmental and cultural solutions

- **Conduct** regular violence risk assessments.
- **Implement** mobile simulation teams to analyze and learn from safety incidents.
- **Build** a culture that encourages reporting without fear of punishment.

“The biggest problem impacting patient safety today is workplace violence — from patients, families, or even colleagues. At the American Hospital Association and the American Organization for Nursing Leadership, we’re supporting the SAVE Act at a federal level, making it a federal offense to assault a healthcare worker. It’s critical that our clinicians’ voices are heard so that we can keep our nurses and other clinicians safe.”

Claire Zangerle, DNP, RN



Action plan

Implementation roadmap for healthcare leaders

Immediate actions

0–6 months

- **Secure** executive commitment and funding.
- **Launch** mobile simulation programs for incident-based learning.
- **Begin** plain-language communication training.
- **Pilot** virtual nursing for discharge education.

Medium-Term

6–18 months

- **Standardize** transition-to-practice programs.
- **Expand** specialty-specific immersion initiatives.
- **Implement** AI-powered learning and patient education tools.
- **Establish** mentorship networks and just culture principles.

Long-Term

18+ months

- **Build** sustainable funding models for patient safety programs.
- **Partner** with academic institutions for research and innovation.
- **Prepare** for AI-driven education growth and continuous adaptation.
- **Develop** succession plans for nurse leader continuity.





When patient safety and workforce initiatives are aligned, combining transition support, skills development, and effective communication, organizations could observe improvements in areas such as staff engagement, competency, and overall care quality.

Healthcare organizations that act decisively—aligning nurse readiness, patient education, and workplace safety—can see the greatest improvements in outcomes, engagement, and financial performance.

The path forward is clear: invest in integrated, evidence-based approaches today to ensure safer patients, stronger nurses, and a healthier healthcare system for tomorrow.

For more information, please visit elsevier.com/health/nurse

“Some of our biggest opportunities to improve outcomes come from how we educate and communicate with patients — taking a coordinated, team-based approach.”

Tiffany McCauley, MSN, RN



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