



# Patient, Family and Visitor Role in Detecting Early Patient Deterioration

Patient deterioration in the hospital setting caused by adverse events can be preventable. Early detection with timely intervention can improve outcomes. And patients, along with the family members and visitors at their bedside, can play a critical role in detecting early patient deterioration.

A study featured in the April 2024 issue of *The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety (JQPS)* investigated clinicians' views on consumer reporting of patient deterioration through an established hospital consumer-initiated escalation-of-care (CEoC) system.

## THE STUDY

The study aimed to investigate clinicians' views on potential consumer involvement in reporting deterioration through an established hospital CEoC pathway using a paper-based qualitative survey across two hospitals in South Australia. The survey included three demographic and six open-ended questions.

A total of **244 clinicians—198 nurses and 46 physicians**—provided their views on the consumer-initiated escalation-of-care system.

Data were analyzed with a matrix-style framework and six steps of thematic analysis.



46  
physicians

198  
nurses

## THE RESULTS

Six themes emerged:

**1** Clinicians were supportive of consumer reporting and felt that consumers were ideally positioned to recognize deterioration early and raise concerns about it.

**2** Management support was required for consumer escalation processes to be effective.

**3** Clinicians' workload could possibly increase or decrease from consumer escalation.



“Nurses cannot be with one patient all shift so having a family member alert nurses to deterioration will dramatically reduce response time.”

“Patients, relatives, staff ... need to feel comfortable, safe and supported [by management].”

“Increased staff/family/patient awareness may reduce the numbers of [medical emergency team] calls as deteriorating patients may be identified and managed sooner.”

“I feel consumer involvement will dramatically increase “doctor re-views” and “medical emergency team calls” and take time away from clinical work and other sick patients.”

**4** Education of consumers and staff on escalation protocol is a requirement for success.

**5** There is need to build consumer confidence to speak up.

“I think the poster gives the consumer power to ask questions and flag concerns quicker, without the stress of getting told they are wrong.”

“Educating staff so that they can inform patients and family members on arrival to emergency department [i.e., introduce consumers to process, explain when and how to escalate if required].”

“Consumer involvement with [the] healthcare system is vital to build more trust and to build [a more] efficient healthcare system.”

**6** There is a need to address barriers to consumer escalation.

“[We need to use] language or terminology that is appropriate to the level of education and age of those involved. No jargon used.”

The study found that clinicians were supportive of consumers acting as first reporters of patient deterioration. Use of interactive, encouraging communication skills with consumers was recognized as critical. Annual updating of clinicians on consumer reporting of deterioration was also recommended. A range of passive and interactive educational materials on the escalation-of-care process to boost consumer knowledge and confidence, particularly among vulnerable populations, was also recommended.

To learn more about this study, visit:  
[https://www.jointcommissionjournal.com/article/S1553-7250\(24\)00005-9/fulltext](https://www.jointcommissionjournal.com/article/S1553-7250(24)00005-9/fulltext)

