



SHBN Report: World Patient Safety Day 2022 'Medication Safety'

In 2022 the [Safer Healthcare and Biosafety Network](#) launched the [Safety For All Campaign](#) with Patient Safety Learning, with the aim of putting healthcare worker safety at the heart of patient safety. This year, [World Patient Safety Day](#) is on 17th September 2022 and the selected theme is 'Medication Safety', with the slogan 'medication without harm', aligning strongly with the Safety For All campaign.

Currently, the WHO states that medication harm accounts for [50% of the overall preventable harm in medical care](#), and that US \$42 billion of global total health expenditure worldwide can be avoided if medication errors are prevented. Given the scope of the issue and in line with the Safety For All Campaign, medication without harm cannot be truly achieved without considering patient and healthcare worker safety as two sides of the same coin.

The main victims of medication errors are the patients who are harmed and their families. However, they are not the only ones affected or who suffer. The health professionals involved directly or indirectly in an adverse event and who suffer emotionally as a consequence, though less visible, are also victims. The [WHO's Global Patient Safety Challenge, 'Medication Without Harm'](#), explains "experience from other high-risk industries, and WHO's longstanding work with experts in health care safety, demonstrate that human beings make mistakes rarely through neglect, but instead because the systems, processes and procedures that they work with are often flawed or dysfunctional." While mistakes are rarely made through neglect, healthcare workers still often bear the responsibility both professionally and emotionally for medication errors and resultant patient harm.

Health care workers involved in patient safety incidents are often traumatised as they feel personally responsible for the event, having a negative effect on their performance. According to the [available research](#), the most common emotional reactions of affected healthcare professionals include: anxiety, obnubilation, confusion, difficulty concentrating on tasks, depersonalisation, frustration, guilt, sadness, mood changes, insomnia, constant replaying of the incident, lack of professional confidence, and fear of legal action and loss of reputation. This in turn can cause harm to more patients, creating a chain of harm stemming from poorly understanding the relationship between patient and healthcare worker safety and protecting all involved in a medication error appropriately.

Research into the mental and psychosocial impact on healthcare workers following medication errors and adverse events is limited. In particular, very little is known about the incidence of error in non-hospital settings or about the harm caused by it. According to the WHO, medication errors occur when unreliable medication systems and/or human factors such as fatigue and lack of health care workers affect the practice of prescribing, dispensing, administering and monitoring medication. The most frequent errors occur during the medication administration phase in hospitals.

Earlier this year the [European Biosafety Network commissioned research](#) from Ipsos MORI on the type and rate of mental and psychosocial disorders amongst hospital nurses, their causes and effects and whether they are linked to a medication error causing a serious adverse event. The survey was conducted between the end of October 2021 to late January 2022 and included 350 hospital nurses who have suffered mental health or psychosocial issues (out of 523 nurses contacted).

Key findings of the research included:

- Amongst European nurses there is a high incidence rate of mental and psychosocial health issues and disorders.
- **Two thirds** of hospital nurses have suffered from mental and psychosocial health issues, especially in Italy and Poland, and among oncology nurses.
- **Over half** of nurses have NOT received any professional and adequate psychological therapy. Those who have received help have mainly paid for the therapy themselves.
- **Anxiety** is the main mental and psychosocial health disorder that nurses are suffering, and this has mainly occurred during the COVID pandemic, leading to **chronic workplace stress**.
- **Increased pressure of work and stress and lack of staff and resources** are stated to be the main reasons for these mental and psychosocial disorders.

The evidence for the detrimental impact on healthcare professionals following medication errors here is notable. Adding to the already worrying statistics around medication harm in relation to patient safety, it's clear that under the World Patient Day theme of 'Medication Safety', healthcare worker safety must also be considered.

The SHBN supports the WHO campaign and following the success of the Safety For All campaign, also aims to improve practice in, and between, patient and healthcare worker safety to prevent safety incidents and deliver better outcomes for all. Our core aim is to make healthcare environments safer for patients and workers alike. We believe raising awareness around Healthcare Worker Safety and Patient Safety among policymakers and the public will make everyone safer.