

The Many Faces of Safety

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June marked the celebration of the National Safety Council's (NSC) National Safety Month. Chartered in 1913, the NSC is a not-for-profit organization that promotes safety of Americans at home, on the roads, and at work. The NSC dedicates each week in June to a different aspect of safety, particularly reminding us to review workplace, driving, emergency preparedness and home and community this year.

Being safe in today's world has taken on a new meaning, as home security systems, monitored parking garages, and personal cell phones are the norm. This raises the question, "What does personal safety mean to you?" What measures can you take to improve your personal safety?

When applied to healthcare, the word "safe" also has an important meaning—free from risk or injury. Newspapers, TV and magazines are full of heartbreaking stories about untoward patient incidents. As a result of patient-related mishaps and medical errors, safety in healthcare has become a national priority. The same questions we ask about our own safety can be asked about the safety of the patients we care for. What does patient safety mean to me? What can I do to improve patient safety in my practice?

One organization dedicated to patient safety is the American Society of Healthcare Risk Management (ASHRM). In addition to promoting effective and innovative risk management strategies, ASHRM also focuses on developing and implementing safe and effective patient care strategies. Each year, ASHRM celebrates Healthcare Risk Management Week in June. This year's theme was "Make Your Mark."

How can you make your mark? There are numerous opportunities and resources available to strengthen safety in our personal lives as well as in the lives of our patients. First, pause to become more aware of safety; next identify strategies for improving safety; and, finally, make a commitment to continually improve safety at home and at work. Safety is a universal issue.