Patient Identification

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Q. The Joint Commission has identified accurate identification as one of the National Patient Safety Goals. It requires that staff verify the patient with two-patient identifiers before providing a treatment or service. What is the purpose of this safety goal?

A. This safety goal exists to ensure that the correct patient receives the correct treatment, intervention or service.

Q. What are the MGH policies and procedures on patient identification?

A. As part of the MGH's commitment to patient safety, at least two forms of patient identification are required: name, date of birth, medical record number, social security number and/or facial recognition. Though there are options, the same two forms of identification must be used in a given setting. For example, Patient Care Services staff use patient name and medical record number as the two identifiers for inpatients. In the ambulatory setting, each practice has the option of choosing two identifiers from among the five approved identifiers listed in the policy. Their choices are made according to what makes the most sense for how their practice operates. For instance, ambulatory specialty practices that see a patient several times per week may opt for facial recognition and another identifier, while another specialty that sees a patient only in consultation may use name and date of birth. The method of verification must match the patient to the treatment or service being provided. For example, when a specimen is collected, the patient's name and medical record number on the patient's wristband should be matched to the name and medical record number on the requisition and specimen labels. Specimens should be labeled as soon as they are collected in the presence of the patient.

Q. How does the MGH demonstrate compliance with Joint Commission requirements on patient identification?

A. An example of how the MGH complies is seen with the handling of specimens. The laboratory will not process any specimens if the patient identity is unclear. There are also several policies and procedures that incorporate the requirement for two patient identifiers. Examples are blood transfusion and medication policies.

Q. How will the Joint Commission's review of MGH compliance on patient identification affect the typical MGH employee?

A. The surveyor may watch employees perform procedures, such as medication administration and specimen collection. Surveyors may also ask employees how they know they are giving a medication to the right patient.

Q. Where can an employee find more information about patient identification?

A. For more information about patient identification, visit www.jointcommission.org and read about it under "National Patient Safety Goals." Information is also available in the MGH Clinical Policy and Procedure Manual, which can be accessed by visiting the *intranet.massgeneral.org* and then clicking on:

- Resources
- Policies and Procedures
- Clinical Policies and Procedures
- Clinical Policy and Procedure Manual
- Identity Verification