



Information and Privacy
Commissioner/Ontario

Commissaire à l'information
et à la protection de la vie privée/Ontario

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A potentially life-saving message for hospitals from Commissioner Cavoukian

TORONTO – Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner, Dr. Ann Cavoukian, has been so moved by an initiative by the World Health Organization (WHO) to enhance surgical safety that she is delivering a special message today to Ontario hospitals, with whom she has been working closely for the past five years, ever since the introduction of Ontario's *Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA)*.

On the same day that a leading forum sponsored by the Canadian Patient Safety Institute on patient safety and quality improvements opens in Toronto, the Commissioner is releasing a paper, *Surgical Safety Checklist: A Must for Hospitals Performing Surgery*, that links one of the key principles of information privacy – **data accuracy** – to the Surgical Safety Checklist developed by WHO and implemented by Toronto's University Health Network (UHN), comprised of three major hospitals.

The Commissioner applauds the work of Toronto General Hospital and the UHN in the leadership they have shown. Toronto General was one of eight hospitals, in eight different countries, on five continents that participated in a pilot study to test the effectiveness of the Surgical Safety Checklist. Early in the pilot study, UHN recognized the potentially enormous life-saving benefits of the Checklist and decided to immediately implement the Checklist process in all three of its hospitals, including Toronto Western and Princess Margaret. (The Checklist is now used in each of the 23,000-plus operations performed in these facilities every year.) The results of the pilot study were published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* early in 2009.

The Checklist includes both personal and non-personal information covering such things as confirmation of patient identity prior to the administration of anesthesia; review of patient allergies; instrument; sponge and needle counts, and wrap-up procedures.

“It is an excellent illustration of the simple but powerful principle that information should be as accurate, complete, and up-to-date as possible, for the purpose at hand,” said Commissioner Cavoukian. “When it comes to your health care, the accuracy of health information is vital – at times, resulting in life-and-death outcomes.”

The pilot study showed that the rate of death of 1.5 per cent following major operations before the Checklist was implemented declined significantly to 0.8 per cent after its introduction. In addition, inpatient complications were reduced from 11 per cent before the Checklist, to an astounding seven per cent after its introduction.



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“I hope,” said Commissioner Cavoukian, “that other health-care providers will join UHN in leaping at the opportunity to implement this simple, cost-free, and profoundly effective technique in their operating rooms. By doing so, they will ensure that they have the right information, about the right patient, available to the right practitioner, at the right time.”

The Commissioner – who is personally very familiar with hospital operating rooms – also strongly praised the Canadian Patient Safety Institute, which has led the push in Canada for the implementation of the Checklist, with the support of a number of other health organizations.

Dr. Michael Baker, Executive Lead – Patient Safety for the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, described the Checklist as “a highly worthwhile initiative;” he “strongly supports the advice that every hospital should be implementing a patient safety checklist.”

The UHN’s chief surgeon, Dr. Bryce Taylor, who led the effort to tailor the Checklist to UHN’s context, describes it as a simple and inexpensive tool. “We know that it can dramatically reduce the incidence of complications associated with surgery. With these kinds of results, there is really no reason why every hospital in the country shouldn’t be implementing the surgery Checklist right away. We thank the Commissioner for drawing more attention to the surgery Checklist initiative.”

And the Commissioner sincerely thanks Dr. Baker and Dr. Taylor for their very important efforts, as well as Dr. Robert S. Bell, President and Chief Executive Officer at UHN, for the foresight he showed in implementing the Checklist for all surgeries performed at the three hospitals. Commissioner Cavoukian asks, “If you were a patient, wouldn’t you want your surgical team to be using this valuable tool?”

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