

Patient Identification Campaign Summary

Northeast Valley Health Corporation strives to be a high reliability organization where every day is a “Zero” day. Every member of the Northeast Valley Health Corporation team is committed to making certain that zero harm events of any kind will occur on any given day. In order to achieve this degree of reliability, leaders and staff acknowledge they must build strong processes and systems that are designed to support patient safety and prevent harmful events from occurring. Perhaps the most important such process, but one which is often overlooked, is ensuring that patients are properly identified at every point of transition throughout the delivery of care, treatment, and services.

Patient identification errors can disrupt care and harm patients in virtually every type of healthcare setting and every aspect of care including procedures, diagnostic testing, medication administration, and billing. The Joint Commission has named improving the accuracy of patient identification as a goal since 2003 when the National Patient Safety Goals first went into effect. Since 2014 patient identification has topped the various National Patient Safety Goals lists as the most important among them. The National Quality Forum lists wrong-patient mistakes as serious reportable events. Even the media has named events involving wrong-patient errors when reporting “shocking medical mistakes.” Nevertheless, despite all the attention given to patient identification, mistakes continue to occur.

With a generous grant from the NORCAL Group Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving health care in local communities, Northeast Valley Health Corporation has endeavored to develop and implement a patient identification campaign entitled “We ask because we care.” Staff are trained to “Expect to check” every patient every time by utilizing at least two patient identifiers at every transition point during the health center visit, as well as during patient interactions that occur before and after the on-site visit. The foundation of the program is a “toolkit” which contains materials for both staff and patients.

Items contained in the toolkit include:

- “We ask because we care” patient flyers (English and Spanish)
- “We ask because we care” and “Expect to check” staff posters
- “We ask because we care” and “Expect to check” staff PowerPoint training
- “We ask because we care” and “Expect to check” quarterly staff training videos
- “We ask because we care” and “Expect to check” monthly staff e-mail reminders
- “We ask because we care” and “Expect to check” computer screensavers
- “We ask because we care” pens and staff ID badge holders

In keeping with a model of patient-and-family-centered care, patients are placed at the center of the “We ask because we care” campaign. Patients and their family members are educated about the importance of being properly identified by all members of the health care team. They are encouraged to speak up whenever they have not been asked to actively participate in the identification process. Most important, through patient surveys that are conducted routinely at each of the health center sites, patients provide the valuable data that is used to evaluate the health center’s performance.

Northeast Valley Health Corporation leadership knows that sustaining safety and quality care is as important as achieving it. To this end, the replenishment of existing patient identification tools and the addition of new tools (such as patient armbands) will remain ongoing priorities in the future. Northeast Valley Health Corporation will continue to make high reliability its utmost concern and to “ask because we care.”