



Patient Safety: A Human Factors Approach

Sidney Dekker

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Increased concern for patient safety has put the issue at the top of the agenda of practitioners, hospitals, and even governments. The risks to patients are many and diverse, and the complexity of the healthcare system that delivers them is huge. Yet the discourse is often oversimplified and underdeveloped. Written from a scientific, human factors perspective, **Patient Safety: A Human Factors Approach** delineates a method that can enlighten and clarify this discourse as well as put us on a better path to correcting the issues.

People often think, understandably, that safety lies mainly in the hands through which care ultimately flows to the patient—those who are closest to the patient, whose decisions can mean the difference between life and death, between health and morbidity. The human factors approach refuses to lay the responsibility for safety and risk solely at the feet of people at the sharp end. That is where we should intervene to make things safer, to tighten practice, to focus attention, to remind people to be careful, to impose rules and guidelines. The book defines an approach that looks relentlessly for sources of safety and risk everywhere in the system—the designs of devices; the teamwork and coordination between different practitioners; their communication across hierarchical and gender boundaries; the cognitive processes of individuals; the organization that surrounds, constrains, and empowers them; the economic and human resources offered; the technology available; the political landscape; and even the culture of the place.

The breadth of the human factors approach is itself testimony to the realization that there are no easy answers or silver bullets for resolving the issues in patient safety. A user-friendly introduction to the approach, this book takes the complexity of health care seriously and doesn't over simplify the problem. It demonstrates what the approach does do, that is offer the substance and guidance to consider the issues in all their nuance and complexity.

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