

Press Call: The Joint Commission Publishes Universal Protocol with Endorsement

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In a December 3, 2003 press teleconference, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (Joint Commission) and leading medical, nursing, and healthcare leadership associations and organizations announced a new nationwide effort to eliminate wrong site, wrong procedure, and wrong patient surgeries. Dr. Dennis O'Leary, President of the Joint Commission, described these events as 100% preventable. The new Universal Protocol™ to standardize procedures for verifying the correct patient, the correct procedure, and the correct surgical site focuses attention on marking the surgical site, involving the patient in the marking process, and taking a final "time out" in the operating room. This protocol will officially become effective on July 1, 2004 for all Joint Commission-accredited hospitals, ambulatory care surgery centers, and office-based surgery sites.

The issue of wrong site surgery was first addressed by the Joint Commission in the 6th *Sentinel Event Alert* published in 1998 and readdressed in 2001 with a follow-up *Sentinel Event Alert*. It was included as one of the 2003 JCAHO National Patient Safety Goals. Several organizations issued statements on this topic, but it became clear there were several approaches and a standardized approach was needed to ensure the best practice was applied. A summit was held earlier in the year; the resulting Universal Protocol is based on a

consensus of experts and has been endorsed by more than 40 organizations, which are listed on the Web page.

The protocol requires site marking in three types of cases: laterality (right/left distinction), multiple structures (fingers, toes), and levels (spine). The protocol applies to surgery in hospitals, ambulatory settings, and physician offices. It includes both traditional operative procedures and other invasive procedures. Examples cited during the press conference in which a chest tube insertion and breast needle location resulted in errors to illustrate that invasive procedures are also fraught with risk.

At the press teleconference, the following persons and organizations endorsed the protocol:

- Dr. Thomas Russell, American College of Surgeons
- Dr. James Herndon, American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
- Linda Groah, RN, Association of Perioperative Registered Nurses
- Nancy Foster, American Hospital Association
- Dr. Arnold Zeal, Baptist Health System

The full Universal Protocol and guidelines can be found at <http://www.jcaho.org/accredited+organizations/patient+safety/universal+protocol/index.htm>.

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