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## OPINION

### **Patient safety must be mandatory**

If you were going to set up an organization to try to reduce medical errors in Oregon, how would you do it? Maybe have hospitals, nursing homes and pharmacies report when they have made a mistake that kills or seriously injures a patient.

Then take that information and try to learn from those mistakes, perhaps by suggesting procedures and strategies for medical organizations to avoid those mistakes in the future.

The Oregon Patient Safety Commission does those things, but it was set up as a voluntary program. Hospitals, nursing homes and pharmacies can decide whether or not to participate.

If patient safety is a priority for the state, we can't imagine why it's voluntary.

The commission met Tuesday in Tualatin and reviewed its progress. Out of the state's 57 hospitals, 52 have signed up to participate, including those in Central Oregon. That's encouraging, except only 23 hospitals have started reporting when they make medical errors.

That's like taking a job and never showing up.

The commission is about to launch its voluntary program for the state's 742 pharmacies. It is also developing administrative rules for nursing homes and then will do the same for ambulatory care centers.

Jim Dameron, the commission's executive director, and Commissioner Dave Widen, the director of pharmacy for Safeway, Inc., both seem optimistic about Oregon pharmacies signing up. Their optimism is encouraging. When it comes to patient safety, though, we think optimism is insufficient.

And then there are the nursing homes. There are 145 in Oregon. In Dameron's words, nursing homes are giving the commission "a lot of pushback." The issue: Some don't like the commission's policy requiring written disclosure to a patient or a relative when a mistake was made that caused a patient death or serious physical injury.

The Legislature has planned to review the progress of the commission and see how well its voluntary program is doing. We think the commission has done fine work with a small staff. It has set up reporting programs and has begun issuing safety bulletins.

But we can't see how the program can be a success without requiring medical organizations to participate. Surely patient safety is important enough to require participation.