



Interview with Commissioner Susan King

Susan King, R.N.,M.S., is Executive Director of the Oregon Nurses Association and has been a board member of the Patient Safety Commission since 2004.

Q: What is satisfying to you about serving on the Patient Safety Commission?

A: As a member of the Patient Safety Commission, satisfaction comes from being a part of starting something new that has such a laudable goal. Learning about health care settings other than what I know about and what safety issues face those settings is also valuable.

Q: What do you see as the biggest patient safety challenge in the state right now?

A: Providing direct care to patients is very difficult in many settings. Our limited primary care capacity, large number of individuals with no access to health care except for Emergency Departments, high acuity of patients in hospitals and prevalent preventable complications of chronic conditions all contribute to work intensity that makes errors not only possible but likely. At the same time, many well intentioned campaigns are occurring that attempt to make patient care safer but in some cases, actually result in more work for clinicians without any evidence that the outcomes are what is desired.

I hope that as the Patient Safety Commission develops, it can serve as a coordinator of the myriad of activities that purport to improve safety and also assist in developing the evidence base for what works.

Q: Each Commissioner represents one aspect of the diversity of entities involved in patient safety. How does this inform your work as a Commissioner / what do you see as your responsibility?

A: Technically I fill a position on the Commission designated for "labor". In that capacity and as a clinically practicing Registered Nurse, I bring the view from the patient's side. In my role as a staff nurse, I am uniquely positioned to evaluate the benefit and burden of our attempts to improve patient safety and can also reflect what patients tell me about their view of our health care system.

Q: How will the employees you represent be safer as patients in hospitals, nursing homes, ASCs because of the Commission's work?

A: As with any new organization, there is a period of time that must be devoted to establishing the infrastructure to carry out the mission. As we learn more about reportable incidents and the environments in which they occur, I believe and hope we will be able to develop guidelines, best practices and advice for both clinicians and patients to guide behavior.