

International Accreditation: What's Good Practice in Sao Paulo is Good Practice in Istanbul

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Accreditation standards are powerful quality improvement tools. Now single standards that reflect the full scope of care and management are being applied to facilities worldwide.

The framework and philosophy of accreditation is a powerful quality improvement tool adopted by many countries worldwide and endorsed by the World Health Organization. Accreditation is generally viewed as a formal process by which an authorized body, either governmental or nongovernmental, assesses and determines whether a healthcare organization meets applicable, predetermined, and published standards. Accreditation standards are intended to be optimal and achievable, focusing on the safe provision of healthcare services to patients in the context of their families and communities. They are designed to encourage continuous quality improvement efforts within accredited organizations.

Since its formation in 1951, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations has been an internationally recognized voice for quality and safety in healthcare through accreditation and the publication of consensus and evidence-based standards. In 1999 the Joint Commission's voice went worldwide with the first of four international accreditation programs of Joint Commission International (JCI), the Joint Commission's international affiliate.

The international accreditation programs of JCI are based on consensus standards developed by and for healthcare professions from many parts of the world. To date these are the only truly international accreditation standards available that reflect the full scope of clinical and managerial functions. In addition to hospital accreditation standards, JCI offers accreditation for a broad scope of services in the healthcare delivery system, including clinical laboratories, care continuum, medical transport services, ambulatory care, and primary healthcare.

Setting Universal Standards for Diverse Settings

Since the introduction of the JCI hospital accreditation standards, close to 50 healthcare organizations in 12 countries have been awarded JCI accreditation. Many more organizations are in the process of preparing for future accreditation. Healthcare organizations seeking a three-year JCI accreditation must achieve compliance with standards that are organized around major patient-oriented and organizational management functions as reflected in "International Standards for Hospitals," right.

Standards compliance is demonstrated during an on-site external evaluation by a team of multidisciplinary surveyors. The team uses a variety of evaluation techniques to determine whether the intent of each standard is substantially achieved, including leader, staff, and patient interviews; observations; document review; analysis of quality and patient safety data; and a review of open and closed medical records.

A major challenge for JCI as an international accreditation and standards-setting body is to promulgate standards that are universal and transferable as well as sensitive to the unique cultural, infrastructure, and legal needs of healthcare organizations in diverse settings, both developed and developing. For example, standards related to the management of information function must take into account the wide range of information technology that exists in the international healthcare community, from hospitals with highly sophisticated and automated medical record systems and international telemedicine to those that are challenged to implement a standardized and integrated record that follows the patient throughout his or her course of care.

Processes such as obtaining a documented informed consent for surgery, well accepted in the US healthcare system for many years, have been new in a number of countries in which JCI standards have been introduced. Many developing countries that have used the JCI standards as a stimulus for quality improvement and capacity building have found these standards a useful

framework for planning and implementing a basic and standardized medical record for each patient. Prior to JCI accreditation, many international hospitals have had limited (or have lacked) quality monitoring systems that address high risk areas or events such as unanticipated surgical complications, blood usage, adverse events, and administration of anesthesia.

Comprehensive patient records as defined by the specific elements of the standards—such as patient assessments, a plan of care, treatment orders, diagnostic testing results, medication administration record, documentation of surgery and other invasive procedures, anesthesia records, and patient education—have greatly contributed to the capability of accredited organizations to monitor and improve essential aspects of good patient care. In the near future, JCI will implement a voluntary performance measurement initiative that will allow participating JCI-accredited hospitals worldwide to benchmark their performance with each other as well as with hospitals in the US on condition-specific measure sets such as those for community-acquired pneumonia, pediatric asthma, and management of acute MI.

Accreditation often serves as a comprehensive and powerful tool for quality improvement in cultures and countries with very different systems of healthcare delivery. Improvements realized in many processes of care—including those involving the management of information and systems for quality monitoring—have the potential to positively influence the quality and safety of patient care on a large scale.

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Article citation:

Rooney, Anne, and Paul vanOstenberg. "International Accreditation: What's Good Practice in São Paulo is Good Practice in Istanbul." *Journal of AHIMA* 75, no.9 (October 2004): 38-39.

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