

What Your Board Needs to Know About Quality and Patient Safety:

A Joint Commission Guide



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President and Chief Executive Officer, The Joint Commission and Joint Commission Resources

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Introduction

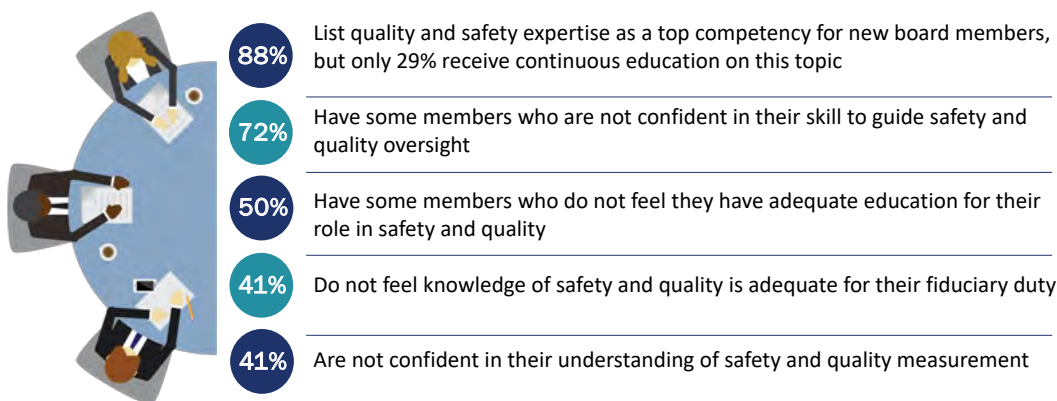
As a board member for a health care organization’s governing body or as a professional involved in coordinating and educating health care board members, you already know that a health care organization’s governing body is composed of individuals from a variety of backgrounds—from the worlds of finance, marketing, local business, education, religious groups, health care providers, not-for-profits, and other community leaders. Diversity is desirable. A successful health care organization board benefits from a collection of different competencies, experiences, and perspectives.

However, you may also have noticed that many of your fellow board members—maybe even you—are from backgrounds outside the health care field. In fact, according to a 2023 study published in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, fewer than 15% of board members at leading hospitals in the United States have a professional background in health care.¹ Furthermore, many do not have a background in the critical topics of quality and safety—and even those who do have experience may not have received regular education on these topics.

This statistic may seem problematic, considering that board members have tremendous responsibility for ensuring quality and safety at a health care organization—an especially heavy lift for those without any professional health care experience. What this statistic does support, however, is the importance of robust and regular board education, particularly on the topics of health care quality and safety.

A health care organization’s board plays an important role in ensuring quality and safety, and yet many governing bodies are not consistently, effectively, or regularly educated on these topics (see Figure I-1 on page xii). Furthermore, research has shown that higher-performing health care organizations are correlated with well-educated boards that discuss and monitor quality and safety in measurable, meaningful ways at every board meeting (see Figure I-2 on page xii).^{2,3}

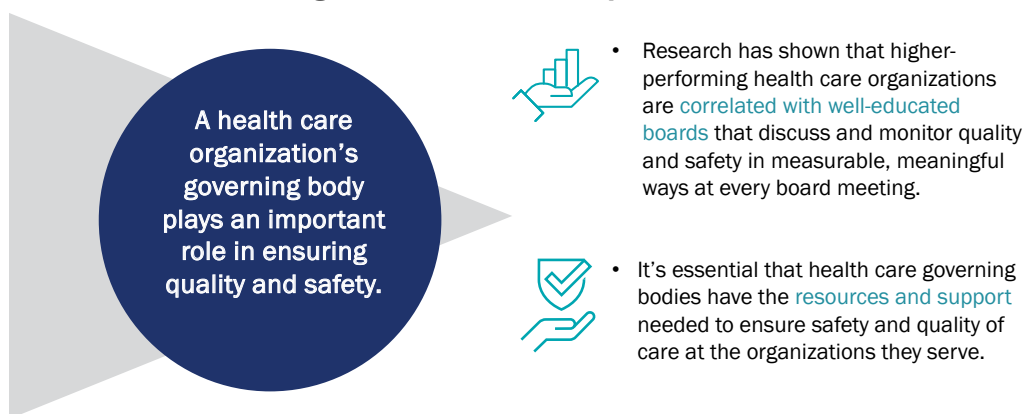
Figure I-1. Board Members and Quality and Safety



Sources: American Hospital Association. *National Health Care Governance Survey Report*, 2019; and Goeschel CA, et al. Board quality scorecards: Measuring improvement. *Am J Med Qual*. 2011 Jul-Aug;26(4):254–260.

The rapidly changing nature of health care means that you, as a board member or perhaps as someone who coordinates the board’s activities, need to stay ahead of the curve and continuously educate yourself on new and emerging quality and safety issues in health care. Some of today’s common challenges have been around for many years (for example, infection prevention and control, medication management, emergency preparedness), while others have moved to the forefront (for example, worker well-being and safety, climate change and decarbonization, health care disparities). There is always much to know and even more to learn as numerous factors come into play with quality and safety. These and other challenges are addressed throughout this book.

Figure I-2. Leadership Matters



Sources: Vaughn T, et al. Governing body, C-suite, and clinical management perceptions of quality and safety structures, processes, and priorities in U.S. hospitals. *J Healthc Manag*. 2014 Mar-Apr;59(2):111–128; and Baker GR, et al. Designing effective governance for quality and safety in Canadian healthcare. *Healthc Q*. 2010;13(1):38–45.

Purpose of This Book

Odds are, if you're reading this book, you are either a board member for a health care organization or responsible for coordinating the activities of the governing body at a health care organization. And you are likely very serious about the role of the governing board in ensuring health care quality and patient safety at your organization—as you should. This book is indeed for you.

But why is The Joint Commission writing this book, and why now? As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, quality and patient safety are even more important than ever before. Throughout its more than 70 years, The Joint Commission has always been an authoritative, trustworthy champion for quality and patient safety, and many organizations and health care professionals are looking to us for our insights and support, particularly now.

The purpose of *What Your Board Needs to Know About Quality and Patient Safety: A Joint Commission Guide* is to educate board members like you about some key topics related to quality and safety and to offer recommendations for effective governance. Health care organizations trust The Joint Commission to guide their leaders in what they absolutely must know about health care quality and patient safety. Reading this book will deepen your understanding of ongoing and emerging issues and reinforce your knowledge of and commitment to improving quality of care and safety, which will assist you in carrying out your responsibilities as a board member. These issues are addressed as they pertain to Joint Commission standards and also—and more importantly—through the broader lens of improving the health of the global community.

Remember: Safety and quality aren't important because they're Joint Commission accreditation requirements; they're accreditation requirements because they're important—for every health care organization.

Reading this book and engaging in ongoing education on quality and safety are ways to demonstrate your commitment to your health care organization and the community for which it provides care, treatment, and services.

What Your Board Needs to Know About Quality and Patient Safety aims to answer the following questions:

- What is quality, and why is it important?
- What is the relationship between quality and safety?
- How should board members be educated on issues related to quality and safety?
- What are the board's responsibilities related to quality and safety?
- How should quality and safety be addressed during board meetings?
- How does the board monitor performance improvement related to quality and safety?
- How can the board help an organization achieve its quality and safety goals?

In short, this book gives you an overview from a leading champion of quality and safety—The Joint Commission—of the major issues related to quality and safety. It cannot cover everything in depth, but it does provide a road map for your future, ongoing education. Health care is evolving quickly, and so are quality and safety. This book can't answer all the questions in detail, but it can help you move in the right direction. It should spark your curiosity and desire for more information as a board member.

To get the most from this book, it's also important to understand what it doesn't do:

- It is **not** a checklist of activities that, when completed, proves you have a good board or that you are now an “educated board member.”
- It is **not** a set of step-by-step instructions for boards to achieve safe, quality care, treatment, and services at their organizations. (If only it were that easy!)
- It is **not** a comprehensive guide to all the safety and quality concerns boards ever need to know about.
- It is **not** limited to only those topics explicitly addressed in Joint Commission accreditation standards so that your organization will “pass its survey.”

Audience for This Book

This book provides new and existing board members from all types of health care organizations—regardless of Joint Commission accreditation status—valuable information they need to effectively oversee safety and quality. Most of the content applies to hospitals and health care systems in the United States. However, this book does contain information, insights, and suggestions that can be adapted for other health care settings as well as international health care organizations. Other organizational leaders (such as chief executive officers, chief patient safety officers, chief quality officers, other C-suite executives, board liaisons, and the like) who work closely with the governing board can also benefit from reading this book, either with their board or independently.

A note on language: The term *health care organization* in this book refers to all types of programs and settings offering physical, medical, and behavioral health care, treatment, and services. Different programs and settings refer to those they serve in different ways. However, for simplicity's sake, this book's use of the term *patient* includes residents, clients, and individuals served.

Overview of Contents

This book is divided into four chapters and an appendix, summarized below.

Chapter 1: Overview of Quality and Safety in Health Care Organizations

Chapter 1 begins by defining quality and explores how quality and patient safety are integrally related. It explains the STEEEP® framework and how it is used to define and measure quality of care. The chapter also summarizes your responsibilities as a board member for quality and safety, including the importance of accountability and transparency at various levels.

Chapter 2: Current Challenges Related to Quality and Safety

Chapter 2 provides snapshots of some of the top areas of concern related to quality and safety for health care organizations. Among the challenges featured are workforce satisfaction and safety, climate change and decarbonization, and infection prevention and control. Please keep in mind that these are snapshots, and each one provides just a brief overview of a key issue and its significance. These executive summaries are not necessarily comprehensive in scope but are intended to spark discussion and further learning for board members.

Chapter 3: The Role of The Joint Commission in Quality and Safety

Chapter 3 provides an overview of The Joint Commission and how it works with organizations to improve quality and safety. It includes a summary of The Joint Commission's accreditation and certification programs, and it explains the accreditation process. Again, it is an executive summary, tailored to the needs of a health care organization's board.

Chapter 4: The Board's Role in Improving Quality and Safety

Chapter 4 details ways that your board can remain engaged in quality and safety issues, participate in your organization's performance improvement goals, and continue to be accountable as a board to the entire organization and the community it serves. The chapter also features a helpful checklist that outlines your responsibilities as a board member according to Joint Commission requirements.

Appendix

The appendix discusses the importance of creating and maintaining a diverse, multidisciplinary board and board-level quality and safety committee. It also addresses methods for evaluating the board and includes a helpful tool for assessing individual board members' engagement and a skills matrix to identify leadership gaps.

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