

GUIDELINES

Media guide for healthcare issues related to patient safety

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Generalitat de Catalunya
**Departament
de Salut**



**Consell
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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), a *patient* is someone who receives healthcare while *healthcare* is understood to be those services received by people or communities whose aim is to promote, maintain, safeguard or restore health.

In this respect, when patients receive healthcare they want to feel safe and health professionals strive to offer safe, effective and efficient assistance. Communication and close collaboration between patients, relatives and healthcare professionals is therefore key to improving healthcare safety as we are all responsible for reducing and preventing adverse events in medical care.

An *adverse event* is any circumstance related to the care received by patients that has negative medical consequences for their health; for instance becoming infected in hospital or a mistake in medication. Risks that can be reduced and even avoided when there is clear information regarding what might happen and how to act in certain situations.

Patient safety means reducing the health-related risk of unnecessarily harming patients to an acceptable minimum and whenever possible since not all adverse events can be avoided. In this respect safety is also affected by knowledge at the time, the resources available and the context in which healthcare is provided.

The media are a highly valuable tool for passing on information and spreading good practices, helping to increase knowledge and encouraging critical analysis among the population at large as they can broadcast a message to all citizens, raise their awareness and ensure they take an interest in issues relevant for their health.

That's why the Catalan Health Department and the Catalan Audiovisual Council have produced this document, which aims to summarise recommendations for the media in different areas related to patient safety to ensure they transmit interesting, high quality information in line with good practices.

2. GENERAL GUIDELINES REGARDING NEWS CONTENT

When handling information that refers to aspects of patient safety, and to ensure citizens receive factual, appropriate and reliable information, a series of considerations must be taken into account:

2.1. Diversify sources of information in the area of patient safety

The need for the media to use simplified information that is easy to transmit can result in stereotyped opinions being given that, as such, are very difficult to refute, even more so when amplified by the media. However, the exclusive and prevalent use of certain sources such as public institutions or professional organisations in detriment to others, such as people affected directly by the issue or the organisations representing them, can also help to create stereotypes.

Diversifying sources and improving the quality of information, attempting to provide as much documentary evidence as possible regarding the issues to be covered, help us to avoid creating stereotyped views and to be able to compare information more conscientiously.

2.2. Request professional advice related to patient safety

When covering an issue related to patient safety, advice must be sought from officially recognised people in the area in question, at the level of institution (the Patient Safety Promotion Unit of the Catalan Health Department), the health system (patient safety experts at health centres, medical staff at hospitals, emergency services, nursing staff, etc.) or society (such as carers).

2.3. Encourage the training of journalists in patient safety

Journalists should be encouraged to train in patient safety to ensure communication professionals are able to pass on information properly and conscientiously, guaranteeing the free formation of public opinion and avoiding the oversimplification, dumbing down or decontextualisation of the event or information.

2.4. Avoid sensationalising adverse events related to patient safety

In the case of direct audiovisual news content in which one or more individuals have suffered the consequences of an accident related to patient safety at health centres, this information must be duly treated as to avoid sensationalism. In this respect it's

advisable not to broadcast stereotypical or sensationalist images such as close-ups of injuries.

2.5. Encourage a wider range of issues, shifting the discourse away from a purely alarmist focus

The news media often only cover patient safety issues when these occur as part of an adverse event; i.e. any circumstance related to healthcare received by patients with negative medical consequences, such as becoming infected in hospital or a mistake in medication.

An attempt should also be made to diversify programmes focusing on the prevention of risks carried out at health centres, including the positive dimension of news in this area.

3. RECOMMENDED GOOD PRACTICES IN WORKS OF FICTION

Spreading good practices related to patient safety in works of fiction has a highly positive impact on society at large as it provides knowledge and therefore improves the safety and environment of patients. Promoting recommendations in this area in works of fiction also helps both citizens, who no longer receive contradictory messages that can lead to uncertainty and misunderstanding, and also media professionals who wish to broadcast healthcare messages correctly.

In this respect, fiction can be used to indirectly spread the good practices detailed below, either by encouraging a positive discourse or by explaining the negative effects of bad practices.

Below is a list of basic recommendations to be taken into account when producing works of fiction, classified into different areas of patient safety. Links have also been provided to various websites for further information.

3.1. Encouraging the correct use of medicines

- In scenes where a character is prescribed medicine, the idea should be conveyed that the person has fully understood the prescription, which medicine they've been prescribed and what for, the dose and how long the treatment lasts, as well as encouraging people to read and keep the prospectus provided with all drugs. If the patient takes a range of drugs, they should explicitly ask the doctor if it's appropriate or safe to take the different medications at the same time.

- When a character takes a drug orally (pills or syrups), it should be made clear that these should always be taken with water and no other drink. Taking oral medication without water is also bad practice.

Links of interest:

- What medication is:

- <http://medicaments.gencat.cat/ca/ciutadania/informacio-i-consells/preguntes-frequents/que-son-els-medicaments/>

- How medicine should be taken:

- <http://medicaments.gencat.cat/ca/ciutadania/informacio-i-consells/preguntes-frequents/com-s-han-de-prendre/>

- Tips related to medication:

- http://seguretaddelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/ciutadania/feu_la_vostra_atencio_mes_segura/heu_de_medicar-vos/

3.2. Avoiding stereotypes related to medication

- Eliminate the stereotype that a good doctor always prescribes medication. In many cases there are measures that help a patient's illness to run its due course without the need for medication (rest, correct hygiene, etc.).

- Avoid showing characters taking medicine on their own initiative. People should be encouraged to seek advice from a pharmacist when taking medication

Links of interest:

- Self-medication:

- <http://medicaments.gencat.cat/ca/ciutadania/informacio-i-consells/preguntes-frequents/automedicacio/>

3.3. Medicine cabinet

- A medicine cabinet is the appropriate place to store medicines and first aid material you might need. Whether a medicine cabinet is in the home, school or work, it must be kept in a cool, dry place (not in the kitchen or bathroom) to preserve its contents, and must be readily accessible.

- When a medicine cabinet appears in a work of fiction, it's important for the container and its medicines to be out of reach of children.

Links of interest:

- Medicine cabinets:

- <http://medicaments.gencat.cat/ca/ciudadania/informacio-i-consells/preguntes-frequents/com-cal-emmagatzemar-los/>

3.4. Disposing of medicines and other healthcare products correctly

- Medicines should never be thrown into the rubbish bin or mixed with other packaging or waste, or disposed of in the waste water system. Their correct disposal should be encouraged; i.e. taking them to a chemist and placing them in the SIGRE container (integrated pack collection system).

- The correct disposal of x-rays and similar products should be encouraged. They should never be thrown into the rubbish bin or mixed together with other packaging or waste but taken to the chemist or health centre to be disposed of correctly, respecting the environment.

Links of interest:

- How to dispose of medicines:

- <http://medicaments.gencat.cat/ca/ciudadania/informacio-i-consells/preguntes-frequents/com-cal-emmagatzemar-los/>

3.5. Encouraging good practices related to doctor visits

- When fictional characters have a medical appointment, scenes must be produced where the patient explains, in detail, all his/her clinical information to the doctor: what the problem seems to be, how long they've been suffering, where they have any discomfort or pain, any medication being taken and if they suffer from any allergies.

- With fictional characters who might have problems in understanding the information provided by healthcare professionals, the idea should be encouraged that patients should be accompanied by a relative or another person to ensure their healthcare is safer or more easily understood.

- Images should be avoided in which people trivialise the clinical training or opinion of healthcare professionals.

Links of interest:

- Tips for medical appointments:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/ciutadania/feu_la_vostra_atencio_mes_segura/eniu_una_visita_programada/

3.6. Health tests

- When a work of fiction shows medical tests being prescribed, patients should ideally be shown asking the doctor about the tests being suggested. They should ensure they have good information, that they know what the tests consist of and what needs to be done (whether they can eat or drink beforehand, if they have to stop any current treatment, etc.), what they need to bring (a urine or faeces sample, etc.), as well as knowing the benefits and risks of the diagnostic tests requested or how long they will have to wait for the results.

- It's important for those people playing healthcare professionals to use simple, easily understood language and to inform patients how a test can help in their diagnosis or assess their illness. A lot of tests does not necessarily mean better healthcare.

Links of interest:

- Do you have to take a health test? Tips to be followed:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/ciutadania/feu_la_vostra_atencio_mes_segura/heu_de_fer-vos_proves_mediques/

3.7. Patients being hospitalised

When the script of a fictional programme requires someone to be hospitalised, it's important for the fictional patients to behave correctly, such as:

- Checking all the patient details are correct.

- If the patient has allergies, checking the healthcare personnel have this information.

- In the case of women, informing the healthcare personnel if they're pregnant and making sure they are aware of this at all times.

- Patients and also the people looking after them during their time in hospital should wash their hands after touching any contaminated material and after going to the bathroom.

- No trivialisation, following the instructions of the healthcare staff at all times.

Links of interest:

- More information on tips for patients when entering a hospital:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/ciutadania/feu_la_vostra_atencio_mes_segura/heu_d_ingressar_a_l_hospital/

3.8. Hospital visits by family or friends

Visits by relatives or friends to someone in hospital should also show positive behaviours, such as:

- Encouraging images of relatives or friends washing their hands before touching the patient.

- Avoiding images of visits by relatives or friends who are ill, with a cold or potentially infectious illness.

- Not bringing hospitalised patients food from outside.

- Not bringing children on hospital visits as they are highly sensitive and could catch something from the hospitalised patients.

Links of interest:

- Recommendations for visiting hospitalised patients:

- <http://www.vhebron.net/familiar-ingressat>

3.9. Encouraging good practices among healthcare professionals

Regarding the practices of fictional healthcare staff at centres, the following behaviour should be encouraged:

- **Accurately identifying the patient.** Patients must wear a clearly identifiable ID system such as conventional bracelets, bracelets with bar codes or radio systems. Healthcare workers should also check the identity of patients.

- More information on clearly identifying patients:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/professionals/bones_practiques/com_evitar_errors_en_la_identificacio_de_pacients/
- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/professionals/la_seguretat_en_imatges/

- **Correct hand hygiene among healthcare workers.** Images should be encouraged with healthcare workers carrying out this practice, using soap dispensers or alcohol-based solutions, or it should be suggested they are doing so. For more information:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/professionals/la_seguretat_en_imatges/
- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/detalls/article/higiene_de_mans

- **Measures to ensure patients do not fall.** Images should be encouraged in line with the recommended standards, such as:

- a) The health centre's room should meet the conditions established to prevent falls.
- b) Patients must be transferred with the help of professionals.
- c) The patient's bed must be set at the low position.
- d) In the case of patients getting out of bed, they must be wearing non-slip slippers, not open at the back, and put on correctly.
- e) Images of immobilised patients should be avoided.
- f) Equipment must be available to help move patients.

For more information:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/professionals/bones_practiques/com_evitar_caigudes/
- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/web/.content/minisite/seguretatpacients/ciutadania/documents/arxiu/triptic_previnguem_les_caigudes.pdf

- **Encouraging images of correct blood transfusions:**

- Spreading images of the correct identification of patients, as well as their blood group.

- With the transfusion being supervised by nursing staff.

For more information:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/ciutadania/que_heu_de_vigilar/errada_en_la_transfusio_de_sang/
- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/professionals/la_seguretat_en_imatges/

- **Hand washing in the operating theatre (surgical scrub).** Images should be encouraged with health professionals correctly washing their hands, nails and forearms before entering an operating theatre. For more information:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/professionals/la_seguretat_en_imatges/

- **Safe practices in surgical operations** where patients are identified correctly and there is confirmation among those professionals involved (surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses, etc.) regarding the kind of operation to be carried out, everyone being in agreement and checking that the surgical equipment has been sterilised. For more information:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/ciutadania/que_heu_de_vigilar/errada_en_la_localitzacio_de_la_intervencio/

- **Surgical objects left in the body.** An attempt should be made to show how surgical instruments and their condition are checked both before the operation and also before stitching up the patient. For more information:

- http://seguretatdelspacients.gencat.cat/ca/detalls/article/Prevenir_errors_en_els_procediments_quirurgics_i_anestesis

4. GUIDELINES FOR SPECIFIC POPULATION SEGMENTS

There are certain segments of the population which, since they are particularly dependent or vulnerable, require special attention or specific measures to improve their safety.

4.1. The elderly

- Images should be encouraged in which elderly people who might not be fully autonomous always visit health centres accompanied by a relative or carer.
- Images should be encouraged of older people using a simple, orderly list of all their drugs when taking their medication (medication plan).
- Images should be encouraged of the elderly using a personalised dosage system (PDS) to take their medication. This is a plastic container especially designed to avoid confusion and help the elderly to keep track of their prescribed treatments.

4.2. Pregnant women

Pregnant women must be particularly careful about any medication they take during their pregnancy. In this respect:

- Images must be avoided of self-medication among pregnant women, focusing on patients asking doctors or pharmacists for advice.
- Also encourage images of patients asking for advice about products based on medicinal plants as these can also hurt the unborn baby even though they are natural.
- Avoid images of x-rays or similar complementary tests on pregnant women.

4.3. Breastfeeding

The following should be taken into account in images of breastfeeding women:

- Avoid self-medication, even in simple cases such as a cold or cough, both of drugs and also of products made from medicinal plants.
- Good hygiene of the hands and breast before feeding is important.

4.4. Children

Special care must be taken in terms of patient safety when young children are used as fictional characters. The main recommendations are as follows:

- Avoid self-medication. A doctor or pharmacist must always be consulted before any medication is given to a child.
- Avoid images of medication being taken in front of children or of people claiming that a syrup tastes "good".
- Medicines should not be left within reach of children.
- Encourage images of drugs being correctly measured out. The use of kitchen spoons must be avoided; a measuring spoon or cup must always be used, normally provided by the manufacturer.

4.5. Other cultures

Fiction can be used as a means of encouraging respect for the cultural diversity of Catalan society by presenting normal situations among healthcare professionals and patients from different cultures. Consequently, the following is recommended in the area of patient safety:

- Encourage images of healthcare professionals showing an interest in learning about the linguistic, religious or cultural aspects of patients from other countries which may affect their safety. For instance, medical specialists need to know about the practice of Ramadan among Muslim patients and attempt to prescribe drugs that can be taken every 12 or 24 hours so they can be adjusted to the mealtimes during this period.
- Encourage images of a cultural mediator as someone who is very important to ensure that patients from other cultures visiting a health centre and who may have problems understanding the language can understand all the information provided.



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