

## **Risk Assessments: Proactive Process for Managing Safety Risks**

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The Joint Commission has recently published an article entitled “Seven-Step Risk Assessments” in their July 2006 Joint Commission Perspectives on Patient Safety™. The idea of performing risk assessments to identify safety issues associated with the various services provided and the physical environment in which these services occur is not a new requirement. However, what is new is that some definitive criterion has finally been provided by the Joint Commission.

JCAHO Environment of Care Standard EC.1.10, Element of Performance No. 4 states, “The hospital conducts comprehensive, proactive risk assessments that evaluate the potential adverse impact of buildings, grounds, equipment, occupants, and internal physical systems on the safety and health of patients, staff, and other people coming to the hospital’s facilities.”

EP-4 pretty much covers the entire spectrum of safety-related issues within and outside of the hospital and is the standard that the surveyors use when there are safety matters not covered by the other EC standards. Therefore, it is imperative that you be proactive and address these safety matters, henceforth considering using the Joint Commission Seven-Step Risk Assessments process as follows:

- 1) Identify the issue(s).
- 2) Develop arguments in support of an issue.
- 3) Develop arguments against that issue.
- 4) Objectively evaluate both arguments.
- 5) Reach a conclusion.
- 6) Document the process.
- 7) Monitor and reassess the conclusion to ensure that it is the best decision.

It is further recommended to: avoid combining issues; create a list of questions for both advantages and disadvantages regarding patient care delivery, staff, visitors/volunteers, work environment, public safety, financial considerations, building & grounds, equipment, and internal physical systems, etc.; conduct an impartial comparison of advantages and disadvantages; submit conclusion to safety, risk, or environment of care committee; document the process; incorporate a monitoring strategy within the risk assessment document including dates for reassessing the conclusions; perform reassessments and procedure if necessary.