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The Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Urges Congress to Support Bipartisan Legislation Making Patient Safety a National Priority

National Patient Safety Board Will Address Preventable Medical Harm, the Third Leading Cause of Death in the U.S.

Washington, D.C., March 18, 2024 – The Human Factors and Ergonomics Society ([HFES](#)) issued the following statement applauding U.S. Representatives Nanette Barragán (D-CA) and Michael Burgess (R-TX) for introducing H.R.7591, **The National Patient Safety Board Act**, legislation to establish a public-private research and development team within the Department of Health and Human Services that is solely dedicated to preventing and reducing healthcare-related harms. This landmark bipartisan legislation is a critical step to improve safety for patients and healthcare providers by adopting patient safety solutions.

“HFES strongly supports the National Patient Safety Board Act as this bipartisan bill recognizes the critical role of human factors principles (or “human factors and ergonomics principles”) in preventing medical errors,” said Susan Kotowski, President of HFES. “By establishing a dedicated research and development team, the Act offers a significant opportunity to improve patient safety through a data-driven and collaborative approach.”

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, medical errors were the third leading cause of death in the United States, with estimates of more than 250,000 patients dying annually from preventable medical harm and [costs of more than \\$17 billion to the U.S. healthcare system](#). Two [recent studies](#) indicate a quarter of patients experience harm while receiving health care. Studies also indicate that [patient safety worsened during the pandemic](#), as have [the strains on the healthcare workforce](#).

The National Patient Safety Board Act would create a National Patient Safety Board (NPSB), a data-driven, nonpunitive, collaborative, independent research and development team housed within the Department of Health and Human Services to address safety in health care. Taking lessons from aviation, which has dramatically increased safety within the industry, the NPSB would identify and anticipate significant harm in health care; provide expertise to understand the causes and precursors to harm; and create solutions to prevent injury/harm in health care.

The NPSB is designed to work with existing federal agencies and long-standing patient safety organizations without displacing them—and without requiring additional burdensome data collection. A key component of the NPSB is a public–private partnership *Healthcare Safety Team* drawing on a range of expertise and designed to gain consensus on solutions.

HFES is part of a coalition of leaders in health care, technology, business, academia, patient advocacy, and other industries that has united to call for the establishment of an NPSB. A list of NPSB Advocacy Coalition members can be found at npsb.org.

“We have seen many valiant efforts to reduce the problem of preventable medical error, but most of these have relied on the frontline workforce to do the work or take extraordinary precautions,” said Karen Wolk Feinstein, PhD, president and CEO of the Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative and spokesperson for the NPSB Advocacy Coalition. “New attention is being paid to longstanding patient safety challenges, but substantial progress requires the creation of a national home for patient safety to promote substantive solutions, including those that deploy modern technologies to make safety as autonomous as possible.”

To learn more about NPSB and take action, please visit npsb.org/housebill

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About the National Patient Safety Board Advocacy Coalition

A coalition of leading healthcare organizations, advocates, and experts is advancing the call to expeditiously establish a public-private research and development team within the Department of Health and Human Services, the National Patient Safety Board (NPSB), to model aspects of the aviation industry within health care. The NPSB would improve and promote public health and welfare by monitoring and anticipating adverse events, creating recommendations and solutions to prevent medical error, and bringing learnings into practice. The public is invited to “Get on Board” with the NPSB today by staying informed and vigilant and visiting npsb.org.

About Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES)

Founded in 1957, HFES is the world’s largest scientific association for human factors/ergonomics professionals. HFES serves the needs of members and the public by promoting and advancing the discovery and exchange of knowledge concerning the characteristics of human beings that are applicable to the design of systems, products, tools, and environments of all kinds. The society’s more than 3,500 members work in educational institutions, companies, government and military research centers, and independent consultancies in 58 countries. For more information, please visit <https://www.hfes.org/>.

