

# Barriers to Speaking Up About Patient Safety Concerns.

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**Source:** Journal of Patient Safety (J PATIENT SAF), Dec2020; 16(4): e230-e234. (5p)

**Publication Type:** Journal Article - research, tables/charts

**Language:** English

**Major Subjects:** Patient Safety  
Communication  
Organizational Culture  
Teamwork  
Nurse Attitudes  
Attitude of Health Personnel

**Minor Subjects:** Human; Descriptive Statistics; Nursing Staff, Hospital -- Psychosocial Factors; Medical Staff, Hospital -- Psychosocial Factors; Surveys; Leadership; Multimethod Studies; Qualitative Studies; Quantitative Studies; Coefficient alpha; Thematic Analysis; Content Analysis; Male; Female; Fear; Feedback; Occupational Safety

**Abstract:** Objectives: We sought to examine the association between willingness of health-care professionals to speak up about patient safety concerns and their perceptions of two types of organizational culture (ie, safety and teamwork) and understand whether nursing professionals and other health-care professionals reported the same barriers to speaking up about patient safety concerns. Methods: As part of an annual safety culture survey in a large health-care system, we asked health-care professionals to tell us about the main barriers that prevent them from speaking up about patient safety concerns. Approximately 1341 respondents completed the anonymous, electronic survey. Results: A little more than half (55%) of the participants mentioned leadership (fear of no change or retaliation) and personal (ie, fear of negative feedback or being wrong) barriers concerning why they would not speak up about patient safety concerns. The remaining participants (45%) indicated they would always speak up. These findings about barriers were consistent across nurses and other health-care professionals. Safety culture (SC) and teamwork

culture (TC) scores were significantly more positive in those indicating they would always speak up (SC = 89%, TC = 89%) than in those who provided reasons for not speaking up (SC = 63%, TC = 64%) ( $t_{1205} = 13.99, P < 0.05$ , and  $t_{1217} = 13.61, P < 0.05$ , respectively). Conclusions: Health-care professionals emphasized leadership and personal barriers as reasons for not speaking up. We also demonstrated an association between not speaking up and lower safety and teamwork culture scores.

**Journal Subset:** Health Services Administration; Peer Reviewed; USA

**ISSN:** 1549-8417

**MEDLINE Info:** *NLM UID:* 101233393

**Entry Date:** 20201208

**Revision Date:** 20201208

**DOI:** [10.1097/PTS.0000000000000334](https://doi.org/10.1097/PTS.0000000000000334)

**Accession Number:** 147345722