

COLA FAST FACTS 35-2018

COLA Patient Safety Program – Patient Identification

COLA began the COLA Patient Safety Program in 2008 with the intent of focusing on areas in laboratory medicine that are found to have high error rates and significant impact on patient safety. COLA is also focused on reducing the frequency of citations for criteria that impact, or can potentially impact, patient safety. Through this program, COLA will identify an existing COLA criterion or patient safety issue as the patient safety goal for each year, and provide education on good laboratory practices for implementation of that safety goal. The program has also been integrated into the COLA survey process.

The COLA Patient Safety Goal for 2018 is:

PRE 16: Prior to the collection of a patient's specimen, is the patient's identity verified using two separate identifiers?

Proper patient Identification is an essential part of the testing process. Laboratories need to be aware of the emphasis in the medical community to reduce medical errors due to misidentification of the patient. A successful mechanism is to utilize at least two patient identifiers to verify that the specimen is being collected from the correct patient. Appropriate identifiers include:

- Name
- Birth date
- Medical record number
- Last 4 digits of social security number

Patients may be asked to state and spell their name, and give their birth date as a means of identification. Some medical offices and outpatient facilities ask for a picture ID to verify the patient's identity. In hospital settings, identity may be verified verbally, and by checking the armband to confirm the identity of the patient.

Bar-coding technology is becoming quite sophisticated, and in some settings may be part of the patient identification system as well as the specimen labeling system. While barcodes can create unique identification, there is still an opportunity for error if the barcode is not matched to the proper individual. In this circumstance, using a second identifier beyond the barcode could help to prevent identification errors and subsequent specimen labeling errors.

Consider this example:

You automatically assume that when you call out a name to a waiting room full of people that you will be properly heard and the correct person will respond. Do not make this assumption! Confirm the patient identity by asking the patient to state and spell their full name, and state their date of birth. Verify that the same identifiers are present on all of the following that are applicable:

- Requisition (order)
- Patient wristband
- Patient chart
- Barcodes
- Sample labels

Correct patient identification is critical. Test results performed on specimens collected from a misidentified patient will be linked to the wrong patient, and may put the health of two patients at risk.

Think about this important patient safety goal, and take steps to ensure compliance in your laboratory.