

## Nurses on Guard - Error Prevention and Management

# Universal Protocol: Preventing Wrong Site, Wrong Procedure, Wrong Person Surgery

By Anne Michel, MSN, RN

*In the April 2009 issue of the Board of Nursing Bulletin, Ms. Michel discussed the role of patient involvement in enhancing patient safety as part of the National Patient Safety Goals. In this issue, Ms. Michel continues her discussion of the National Patient Safety Goals as they relate to Universal Protocol.*

The Joint Commission's (TJC's) efforts to prevent wrong site, wrong procedure and wrong person surgery, known as Universal Protocol (UP), became effective in 2004. All accredited hospitals, ambulatory care, and office-based surgery facilities are required to comply. TJC recently revised the requirements for Universal Protocol with implementation in January, 2009 for Ambulatory, Critical Access Hospitals, Disease-Specific Care, Hospitals, and Office-Based Surgery.

The changes to the UP impact all patient care units or areas that perform invasive procedures, including procedures completed outside of operating rooms. Accredited facilities are required to update their current policies, documentation and patient care practices to meet the new requirements.

### **What are the three elements of Universal Protocol: Procedural Safety?**

1. Conduct a pre-procedure verification.

2. Mark the operative/procedure site to identify unambiguously the intended site of incision or insertion.
3. Conduct a "time out" immediately before starting the procedure verifying:
  - Correct patient, using two identifiers;
  - Correct side and site marked;
  - Correct procedure consent form completed;
  - Agreement on procedure to be performed;
  - Correct patient position;
  - Relevant images and results are properly labeled and appropriately displayed;
  - The need to administer antibiotics or fluids for irrigation purposes; and
  - Safety precautions based on patient history or medication use.

### **Who completes site marking with the new requirements?**

The licensed provider performing the procedure will now be required to complete the site marking for procedures in which this is required.

### **What is the process for exceptions to site marking (if the site cannot be marked)?**

The Joint Commission outlines certain procedures that would not require site marking and allow for patient refusal of marking as well. Facilities are required to define their own exception process for these specific cases.

### **What role does nursing have in ensuring patient safety related to Universal Protocol elements?**

As a member of the procedural care team, nurses play a key role in ensuring the right site, procedure and patient are verified. It is critical that nurses actively participate in the steps of the UP process. Nurses and other members of the procedure care team should actively and directly communicate to verify the patient, site, and procedure. Nurses may also play a role in documentation, as a checklist is now required by TJC. Nursing care that was provided must be documented according to the UP elements. Nurses and other members of the procedure team should be empowered to question at any time if there is a discrepancy with regard to patient identification, site location or the procedure to be completed.

### **Where do I go for more information?**

<http://www.jointcommission.org/>  
<http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/NationalPatientSafetyGoals/>  
<http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/UniversalProtocol/>

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