



Delaware Healthcare Association

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Improving Patient Safety: Delaware Hospitals Adopt
Common Color Wrist Bands

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As part of its mission to ensure patient safety during hospital visits, The Delaware Healthcare Association today announced implementation of a voluntary initiative among Delaware hospitals to standardize the use of color-coded patient wristbands.

All Delaware acute care general hospitals have adopted the following colors and meanings to convey specific information to physicians and nurses about patient care:

red for patient allergies;
yellow for a fall risk; and,
purple for do-not-resuscitate preferences.

Color-coded wristbands are used to quickly convey critical patient information to health care workers during emergencies or where a patient may be non-responsive. They are an important part of ensuring timely care.

“Many doctors, nurses and other healthcare practitioners work in more than one facility, each with its own set of wristband colors,” said Bonnie Perratto, Chief Nursing Officer at Bayhealth. “Standardizing the color of patient wristbands provides a visual cue regarding a patient’s condition, regardless of where that care is being delivered. This benefits our patients because consistency of care will be improved.” Bayhealth and Beebe Medical Center implemented the standardized color-coded patient wristband system last spring while most other hospitals completed their wristband standardization process earlier this month. (Reliance on color-coded wristbands has been problematic in pediatric hospitals which is why Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children has opted instead for an integrated electronic record system with bedside bar-coding, enabling safer and faster recognition of pediatric patient conditions.)

Prior to the recent adoption, some of Delaware’s hospitals were using color coded wristbands for designated conditions, but the wristband colors varied from hospital to hospital. Fall risk was denoted as green in one hospital, yellow in another, and orange in the third. Similarly, allergies were identified by a green wristband in one hospital and red in another. “Do not resuscitate” wristbands were either green, purple, or blue depending on the facility. “The potential for human error will be reduced now that all acute care general hospitals have agreed to use the same colors,” said Wayne Smith, President and CEO of the Delaware Healthcare Association. “This is one step our hospitals have taken among many toward improving patient care, especially during patient transfers between hospitals. The Association and its Board commend the Chief Nursing Officers of our member hospitals for fast tracking the new wristband system through their institutions.”

Movement toward a national standard of color coded patient wristbands gained momentum after the notorious 2005 incident in Pennsylvania in which a patient nearly died because a nurse incorrectly

used a yellow wristband assuming it meant “restricted extremity” like it did at another hospital where she worked, when at this hospital yellow meant “do not resuscitate”. Since the 2005 incident, thirty-six states have adopted or committed to adopting the national standardized wristband system. The American Hospital Association has also endorsed the color-coded patient wristband system calling it, “a sensible approach to improving patient safety.”

For more information contact, Wayne Smith at (302) 674-5843.

The Delaware Healthcare Association is a statewide trade and membership services organization that exists to represent and serve hospitals, health systems, and related health care organizations in their role of providing a continuum of appropriate, cost-effective, quality care to improve the health of the people of Delaware.