

Institute for Safe Medication Practices

1800 Byberry Road, Suite 810, Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006

www.ismp.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 31, 2004

CONTACT: Renee Brehio, Media Relations
704-321-3343
rbrehio@ismp.org

Survey Shows Workplace Intimidation Adversely Affects Patient Safety

HUNTINGDON VALLEY, Pa.—Intimidating behavior is a common element of many healthcare practice settings that may cause medication errors, according to newly released survey data from the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP). More than 2,000 healthcare professionals, including nurses, pharmacists, and other providers, responded to ISMP's November 2003 survey; *7% of those respondents indicated that they were involved in a medication error during the past year in which intimidation clearly played a role.* Below are highlights of the survey results.

Intimidation Impacts Patient Safety. Almost half of all respondents (49%) indicated that past experiences with intimidation altered the way they handle order clarification or questions about medication orders. At least once in the past year, about 40% of all respondents who had concerns about the safety of a medication error assumed that it was correct rather than interact with an intimidating prescriber. Even when the prescriber was questioned about safety, almost half (49%) of respondents felt pressured into dispensing a product or administering a medication despite their concerns.

It's Not Just Physicians. According to respondents, physicians/prescribers used condescending language or were impatient with questions twice as often as other healthcare providers. Sixty-nine percent said a prescriber had at least once in the last year responded "Just give what I ordered," when faced with a question, while 34% of respondents encountered similar pressure from other practitioners. On the other hand, respondents made it clear that intimidating behaviors were not just limited to physicians/prescribers; they encountered a surprising degree of intimidation among other healthcare providers as well.

-more-

Institute for Safe Medication Practices

1800 Byberry Road, Suite 810, Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006

www.ismp.org

ISMP Survey on Intimidation

March 31, 2004

Page 2

Intimidation Takes Many Forms. Intimidation ranges from subtle questioning of judgment to more explicit threatening behavior. Nearly a quarter of respondents often encountered condescending language or tone of voice (21%) or impatience with questions (19%). Almost half of respondents reported being the recipients of strong verbal abuse (48%) or threatening body language (43%) at least once during the last year.

Pharmacists More Affected? Although pharmacists and nurses reported encountering about the same frequency of intimidating behaviors by physicians/prescribers, pharmacists reported more frequent intimidating behaviors from other healthcare providers, especially strong verbal abuse (encountered by 50% of pharmacists, 38% of nurses) and a reluctance to answer questions or return phone calls (83% pharmacists, 69% of nurses). They also reported more frequent effects from intimidation than nurses.

Suggestions for Organizational Response. To reduce workplace intimidation and improve patient safety, ISMP recommends that healthcare organizations create a code of conduct and values. The code should encourage behaviors that safeguard team cohesion and staff morale, sense of self-worth, and safety. ISMP also suggests establishing a conflict resolution process that ensures effective communication, protects patients, and strictly enforces a zero tolerance policy for intimidation, regardless of the offender's standing in the organization.

For additional survey results and more detailed recommendations, visit ISMP's web site at

<http://www.ismp.org/Survey0311.htm>

About ISMP: The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization that works closely with healthcare practitioners and institutions, regulatory agencies, consumers, and professional organizations to provide education about medication errors and their prevention. ISMP represents nearly 30 years of experience in helping healthcare practitioners keep patients safe, and continues to lead efforts to improve the medication use process. In 2004, the Institute is celebrating the 10th anniversary of its official incorporation as a nonprofit organization. For more information on ISMP, or its medication safety alert newsletters for health care professionals and consumers, visit www.ismp.org

-end-