



File Code: 07-07-60

Route to: Chief Nursing Officer  
Quality Leader

July 18, 2007

**TO:** CHA Members

**FROM:** Debby Rogers, R.N., M.S., Vice President, Quality and Emergency Services

**SUBJECT:** Color-Coded Patient Identification Wristband Standardization

The CHA Board of Trustees has approved the use of three color-coded patient identification wristbands — purple for “do not resuscitate (DNR),” red for “allergies” and yellow for “fall risk” — for hospitals that choose to use color-coded wristbands. The board also requested that these hospitals adopt, as soon as feasible, a policy for using this color-coded system. Hospitals should stop using other colors to identify patients for DNR, allergies and fall risk.

Color coding of patient identification wristbands is an increasingly popular method for reducing medical errors and increasing patient safety. However, standardization is needed. In 2006, the Hospital Council of Northern and Central California Board of Directors approved the concept for this patient-safety project and, in partnership with CHA and the Association of California Nurse Leaders (ACNL), conducted a survey of nurse executives throughout California to evaluate support for the development of a statewide standard. The survey revealed that seven solid colors and various multi-color bands are used to represent 29 different conditions in California hospitals. The support for standardizing color-coded wristbands was overwhelmingly positive and validated by a workgroup.

This issue gained national attention when, in December 2005, a patient-safety advisory was issued from the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Reporting System. The advisory reported an incident that occurred in a hospital in which clinicians nearly failed to resuscitate a patient who had a cardiopulmonary arrest because the patient had been incorrectly designated as DNR. The source of the confusion was a nurse who incorrectly placed a yellow wristband on the patient with the understanding that it meant “restricted extremity,” as it did in another hospital where she worked. However, it meant DNR in that hospital. The results from the California survey validated that California hospitals are at risk of a similar type of incident.

Led by the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association (AzHHA), several western state associations, including the Colorado Hospital Association, Nevada Hospital Association, New Mexico Hospitals and Health Systems Association and Utah Hospitals and Health Systems Association, adopted and are in the process of implementing three standardized colors for use in all facilities — purple for DNR, red for allergies and yellow for fall risk — with the words printed on the band to tell what the color means.

The Hospital Quality Committee, Hospital Council, Hospital Association of Southern California and ACNL approved the statewide adoption of color-coded patient identification wristbands that correspond to the policy approved by the western states. The CHA Board approved a policy requesting California hospitals to use these standard colors when using color-coded wristbands.

California has modified the AzHHA policy and procedure, frequently asked questions and staff competency checklist (all attached). A [PowerPoint Presentation](#) for hospitals to use in implementing this policy is also available. The documents also are posted on the CHA website at [www.calhospital.org](http://www.calhospital.org), under *CHA Interactive*, then “Issues,” then “Quality/Patient Safety.”

If you have any questions, please contact me at (916) 552-7537 or [drogers@calhospital.org](mailto:drogers@calhospital.org).

DR:  
Attachments