

## ADVERSE EVENTS

### Safety and Quality in Healthcare



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While safety and quality in healthcare are matters of self-evident social, ethical, and fiscal importance, they can also be beguilingly elusive as objects of study, measurement, and improvement. One consequence of this circumstance is that healthcare practitioners, researchers, and policy makers have recourse to a wide variety of ways of representing and communicating about safety and quality. This discursive and semiotic richness can be an asset unto itself, as it simultaneously reflects the complexity of healthcare, and serves as a vital resource for coping with the uncertainties entailed by that complexity. Yet at the same time, the range of different ways of representing and communicating about safety and quality can also frustrate common understanding, professional and organizational coordination, and the imperatives of measurement and accountability.

#### **Safety and quality in healthcare: An ethnographic investigation of representational repertoires in the pursuit of patient safety and quality improvement**

This study seeks to refine understandings of how dual tendencies are negotiated in practice. The research is based on anthropological participant-observation conducted at patient safety and quality improvement training events in Scotland over an eighteen-month period; on discursive analysis of dominant methodologies and debates within the fields of safety and quality; and interviews with practitioners, policy makers, and experts working in these areas.

The study is theoretically situated at the intersection of three discrete domains of social scientific inquiry: the sociology of knowledge; the anthropology of policy and institutions; and anthropological semiotics. The research seeks to enhance understandings of how taken-for-granted communicative and representational practices might have unforeseen and counter-productive consequences with respect to the goal of improving safety and quality, and also to identify untapped and under-recognized resources in communicative and representational repertoires of healthcare practitioners, policy makers, and researchers.

#### **Publications**

This project is currently running.