ECRI Institute's
PSO Monthly Brief
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Strengthen Systems with Human Factors Engineering

Human factors engineering seeks to identify and address circumstances that hamper a person's ability to perform his or her responsibilities within a system fully. Any event can and most likely does involve human factors components.

The Human Factors Analysis and Classification System (HFACS) (*login required*) categorizes events into four buckets: unsafe acts, preconditions for unsafe acts, supervision, and organizational influences. ECRI Institute PSO has seen many events (*login required*) that underscore the need to use human factors and systems thinking to better identify an event's underlying causes. Without this approach, organizations are missing opportunities to prevent similar events from recurring.

Unsafe acts
This category is comprised of errors and violations. Examples include performing a task at the wrong time, ignoring a warning, taking a shortcut, or deviating from the rules. ECRI Institute PSO has seen instances of such events resulting from time pressures. Another event type that falls within this category is the "routine violation," which is often seen in the form of workarounds.

Preconditions for unsafe acts
Preconditions for unsafe acts include environmental factors, operator condition, and personnel factors. This category focuses on circumstances that can create the potential for an adverse event. ECRI Institute PSO has seen such events related to the effects of mental fatigue, task overload, environmental factors, and inadequate communication.

Supervision
Supervisory factors include inadequate supervision, planned inappropriate operations, failure to address known problems, and supervisory violations. ECRI Institute PSO has seen these factors in events related to insufficient staffing.

Organizational influences
This category includes some of the broadest, most overarching circumstances that can lead to an adverse event, such as organizational climate, processes, and resource management. ECRI Institute PSO has seen such factors in cases in which a lack of formal processes led to an adverse event.

Contact us for help
Do you need help reviewing, analyzing, or learning from an unsafe condition, near miss, or adverse event at your organization? Contact us, and let us demonstrate how we can help you.

Patient Safety Center

Giving the go-ahead to a bad genetic test compromises the safety of the very patients you're trying to help. ECRIgene™ gives you what you need to make well-informed decisions about genetic tests with evidence, coverage policies, CPT codes, and competition. Request your free ECRIgene demo today.

ECRI Institute is Hiring!

Are you seeking employment with an organization that focuses on improving healthcare and values and respects its staff? We are actively looking for patient safety and risk management experts for several positions. Learn more.

World-class research, guidance, and tools made available to the public.

ECRI Institute is committed to patient safety, as it is the key element of our mission. The Patient Safety Center contains publicly available free resources to help all healthcare providers improve the quality and safety of the care they provide.

Sign Up for Our Other Newsletters

We offer free newsletters on important patient safety, risk, and health technology management issues. Sign up today.

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