

ECRI's *Strategic Insights for Ambulatory Care* newsletter is being offered to CAPIC insureds at no cost. If you are interested in visiting any of the links in this edition, please contact Brad Dunkin, Assistant Vice President, at BDunkin@CAPphysicians.com.



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Strategic Insights for Ambulatory Care is a biweekly service provided by ECRI and the Cooperative of American Physicians (CAP). We welcome your comments; please send them to [**AmbulatoryCareRM@ecri.org**](mailto:AmbulatoryCareRM@ecri.org).



What's New?

- ECRI Now: The Congenital Syphilis Epidemic [**watch now**](#)

Spotlight on Policy and Procedure Builders

ECRI offers customizable templates to help you build policies and procedures on important topics.

Need a general customizable template for any topic?

- Sample Policy and Procedure Builder Template [**view**](#)

Looking for a Policy and Procedure Builder on a specific topic?

- Policy and Procedure Builder: Vaccine Management [view](#)
- Policy and Procedure Builder: Peer Review Policy and Procedure For Physician Practices [view](#)



Search for Policy
and Procedure
Builders

Patient Safety & Relations

Over Half of Healthcare Workers View Discrimination against Patients as a Major Problem

What's the news. A survey of 3,000 healthcare workers found that more than half of all workers (52%) believe that discrimination against patients based on race or ethnicity is a major problem or a crisis, according to a [February 15, 2024, article from the Commonwealth Fund](#). Nearly half of all healthcare workers (47%) report witnessing discrimination against patients, and 47% report feeling some or a lot of stress because of discrimination.

Why it matters. Discrimination against patients is a problem that affects patient outcomes and healthcare worker well-being. Organizations should implement strategies to reduce discrimination and improve health equity.

How ECRI can help. [Taking Action: Strategies to Erase Race-Based Disparities in Healthcare Delivery](#) offers strategies to help organizations identify disparities, address barriers to equitable care, and improve health equity.

CDC Issues First Recommendations for Laboratory Syphilis Testing

What's the news. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has announced its [first recommendations](#) for laboratory testing for syphilis, calling for both newer and older methods to be used in conjunction to distinguish between a current infection and a past infection that has been successfully treated. CDC notes that newer serologic tests allow for laboratory automation but must be used in an algorithm, which also can involve older manual serologic tests.

Why it matters. Syphilis is treatable when it is detected, and medications are promptly initiated. According to a [November 2023 CDC statement](#), nearly 90% of

infant syphilis cases in 2022 could have been prevented with timely testing and treatment during pregnancy.

How ECRI can help. Healthcare organizations can implement the strategies in [Taking Action: Strategies to Combat the Congenital Syphilis Epidemic](#) to address and combat this growing epidemic.

Worker & Environmental Safety

Nurses Report Workplace Violence Incidents on the Rise

What's the news. Nearly 82% of nurses reported experiencing at least one type of workplace violence within the past year, and 45.5% say that workplace violence has increased on their unit, according to a [February report published by National Nurses United](#). Nurses most commonly reported being verbally threatened (67.8%), physically threatened (38.7%), and pinched or scratched (37.3%).

Why it matters. According to the report, 37.2% of nurses considered leaving their profession due to workplace violence, 19.2% changed or left their job, and 4.1% left the profession. These results demonstrate that the effects of workplace violence can further exacerbate the nursing shortage.

How ECRI can help. ECRI named [Physical and Verbal Violence against Healthcare Staff](#) the #2 patient safety concern in 2023, detailing action recommendations targeted at leadership, patient and family engagement, workforce safety, and more.

Size of RN Workforce Expected to Rebound after Decline during COVID-19 Pandemic.

What's the news. The total number of registered nurses (RNs) in 2022 and 2023 was 6% higher than in 2019, and the RN workforce is expected to increase to 4.56 million by 2035, which is close to prepandemic projections, according to a [study published February 16, 2024, in JAMA Health Forum](#). In 2035, RNs age 35 to 49 years are expected to make up 47% of the RN workforce, an increase from 38% in 2022.

Why it matters. After a decline of the RN workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic, employment numbers are recovering and expected to meet prepandemic forecasts.

How ECRI can help. ECRI named [Staffing Shortages](#) the number one patient safety concern in 2022.

Legal & Regulatory

\$1.4 Million Verdict for Unaddressed Critical Thyroid Test Results That Proved Fatal

A 30-year-old patient, with a wife and four minor children, was treated for hyperthyroidism that led to fatal thyrotoxicosis. The actions or omissions created liability for the various providers, all of whom settled out of court except for the treating nurse practitioner. In her trial, the jury awarded the patient's estate more than \$1.4 million for failing to properly coordinate care, to timely refer to an endocrinologist, to appreciate the seriousness of the condition, and to timely treat or properly manage the thyroid condition in response to critical test results, according to an article in December 2023 *National Medical Malpractice Review and Analysis*.

A primary care provider noted a swelling in his patient's neck when he presented to his primary care provider's office in the fall for treatment of asthma. Blood tests were conducted; the results showed hyperthyroidism. The nurse practitioner ordered thyroid treatment medication, 10 mg of Methimazole daily, and to return for a checkup in six weeks.

The following spring, the patient again visited his primary care doctor; blood tests were conducted, and the results showed severe hyperthyroidism. Nothing in the medical record reflected communication of the test results to the patient; the treatment plan did not change. Six weeks later, he returned to the primary care doctor; a different practitioner reviewed his case and doubled the thyroid medication, ordered a thyroid ultrasound, and referred him to endocrinology. No follow-up appointment was scheduled at the end of the visit. Within a week, the patient was taken from his home via ambulance after experiencing weakness, nausea, and vomiting. He was unresponsive in the ambulance and died at the hospital. [Source: *National Medical Malpractice Review and Analysis*. December 2023;17(4)]

ECRI Resources:

- [**Resource Collection: Diagnosis: Test, Referral, and Hospitalization Tracking**](#)
- [**Laboratory Critical Communication Log**](#)
- [**Radiology Critical Communication Log**](#)

ECRI Commentary: Missed diagnoses or diagnostic errors are lost opportunities to address health symptoms and treat disease and they are often costly to patients and the healthcare system. Physician practices order various types of tests on a daily basis, including laboratory tests, cardiology tests, and radiology or imaging studies. Because many steps and individuals are involved in the testing process, there are many opportunities for errors to occur.

It is important for organizations to develop policies related to test tracking and follow-up that include standardized procedures, definitions of key terms, and clarity regarding persons responsible for follow-up. The protocol should include fail-safe contingency plans to handle returned tests when the ordering provider is unavailable.

Finally, it is important for providers to communicate all results to patients—including normal results—and establish time frames for reporting all types of test results.

This abstract is a summary of a recent court decision, verdict, settlement, or other action affecting healthcare organizations and their risk management programs. When reviewing this abstract, keep in mind that laws and court decisions vary among jurisdictions and that decisions of lower courts may be overturned on appeal. For specific legal guidance regarding the significance or applicability of this decision, contact legal counsel.



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