

Media and Community Information & Resources

Community Education

Organizations that decide to voluntarily standardize color-coded patient alert wristbands should ensure that other stakeholders and health care providers with whom they have relationships are made aware of the hospital's involvement in this effort. The following list includes organizations that the hospital should alert about the wristband standardization effort:

- Local charitable organizations, particularly those that use and distribute “social cause” wristbands
- Local print and television media
- Local ambulance services
- Local nursing homes
- Local medical society
- Dialysis centers
- Imaging centers
- Wound centers
- Ambulatory surgical facilities
- Home health services
- Hospice providers
- Radiation oncology centers
- Staffing agencies
- Local physician offices
- Affiliated education organizations
- Services for which the hospital contracts

Sample Information Letter: Social Cause and Charity Groups

<<Date>>

<<Recipient>>

<<Organization>>

<<Street Address>>

<<City>><<State>>, <<ZIP>>

Dear:

Hospitals in Michigan and across the country are supporting a voluntary effort to standardize the meanings of color-coded patient alert wristbands used in hospitals in order to improve caregiver recognition and communication and reduce the risk of error by having different meanings attached to different colors in different hospitals. As part of this overall effort, we are discouraging patients from wearing social cause wristbands when hospitalized.

Social cause wristbands are often intended to bring positive awareness to special interests or social movements such as fighting cancer or other diseases, and in some cases, they are worn as a fashion statement. However, hospitals often use color-coded wristbands to provide visual cues about a patient's clinical status or medical condition. This means there is a greater potential for mistakes or errors to occur if hospital staff inadvertently mistake one of the social cause wristbands for one that imparts important clinical information or directives. For instance, a social cause purple wristband is worn to bring awareness to Alzheimer's disease, but a purple alert wristband used in the hospital means that the patient has indicated that he/she does not want to be resuscitated. If a person wearing a purple social cause wristband was to experience a cardiac arrest while hospitalized, hospital staff could mistakenly interpret the wristband to mean that the patient does not want to be resuscitated.

We are encouraging charities, foundations and fundraising groups to consider this information when planning your next event. There are no restrictions or risks associated with the use of lapel pins, ribbons, or beaded bracelets and would suggest these options as suitable alternatives in the future.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and support in this important patient safety initiative. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact **(include appropriate hospital contact)**

Respectfully,

<<Name>>

<<Title>>

<<Hospital Name>>

<<Contact Information>>

Sample Information Letter: Other Community Health Care Providers

<<Date>>

<<Recipient>>

<<Organization>>

<<Street Address>>

<<City>><<State>>, <<ZIP>>

Dear:

Hospitals in Michigan and across the country are supporting a voluntary effort to standardize the meanings of color-coded patient alert wristbands used in hospitals and other health care facilities in order to improve caregiver recognition and communication and reduce the risk of error by having different meanings attached to different colors in different hospitals. As part of this overall effort, we are discouraging patients from wearing social cause wristbands when hospitalized.

Social cause wristbands are often intended to bring positive awareness to special interests or social movements such as fighting cancer or other diseases, and in some cases, they are worn as a fashion statement. However, hospitals often use color-coded wristbands to provide visual cues about a patient's clinical status or medical condition. This means there is a greater potential for mistakes or errors to occur if hospital staff inadvertently mistake one of the social cause wristbands for one that imparts important clinical information or directives. For instance, a social cause purple wristband is worn to bring awareness to Alzheimer's disease, but a purple alert wristband used in the hospital means that the patient has indicated that he/she does not want to be resuscitated. If a person wearing a purple social cause wristband was to experience a cardiac arrest while hospitalized, hospital staff could mistakenly interpret the wristband to mean that the patient does not want to be resuscitated.

As of **(Include Date Here)**, our hospital will be officially using three standard colors for patient alert wristbands to signify three specific medical conditions. Since you may be treating patients that may have been hospitalized at **(Name of Hospital)**, we want to make sure that you know the significance of each color. Additionally, we want to inform you that the established practice is to leave these color-coded patient alert wristbands in place at the time of discharge. If you are providing post-acute care services, you may encounter patients with these wristbands in place which communicate important clinical information. The chart below presents the meaning of each color-coded patient alert wristband:

Wristband Color	Communicates
Red	ALLERGY
Yellow	FALL RISK
Purple	DNR

We encourage you to alert your staff to the meaning of each color. As appropriate, you might also consider using these exact colors to indicate their respective risks in your facility. For more information about this initiative, visit the Michigan Health & Hospital Association Patient Safety Organization Web site at www.mhapso.org.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and support in this important patient safety initiative. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact **(include appropriate hospital contact)**.

Respectfully,

<<Name>>

<<Title>>

<<Hospital Name>>

<<Contact Information>>

Sample News Release/Newsletter Article

The following news release for distribution to local media outlets can be adapted for employee newsletters, or volunteer and community publications.

<<Place on Hospital/Health System Letterhead>>

<<EMBARGOED UNTIL THE MHA PUBLIC RELEASE Scheduled for February 2009>>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date (to be determined)

Contact: NAME, TITLE
PHONE

HOSPITAL/HEALTH SYSTEM NAME to Standardize Use of Color-Coded Patient Alert Wristbands

Voluntary effort by caregivers protects patients

CITY, Mich. — **HOSPITAL/HEALTH SYSTEM NAME** has announced a plan to standardize the use of color-coded patient alert wristbands in a statewide initiative focused on reducing inconsistencies between Michigan hospitals that can result in medical errors. The goal of the effort is to decrease the risk of such errors by standardizing the colors of three patient alert wristbands: allergy (red), fall risk (yellow) and do-not-resuscitate (purple) by June 1, 2009.

“At **HOSPITAL/HEALTH SYSTEM NAME**, our number one priority is ensuring high quality health care for all of our patients,” said **FIRST LAST NAME, TITLE**. “By agreeing to join a majority of hospitals in using the same color wristbands, it improves the patients’ experiences, regardless of which facilities provide the patient care and throughout the duration of a patients’ treatment. This is one simple, but important, step to help ensure safe, quality care.”

At the close of 2008, more than 25 states had standardized color-coded patient alert wristbands. Consistent with these states, the Michigan Health & Hospital Association Patient Safety Organization (MHA PSO), headquartered in Lansing, is leading a similar effort to consistently and effectively communicate an alert to a health care provider if the patient has an allergy, is a fall risk, and/or carries a do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order. In addition to the meaning associated with the specific color, the alert is pre-printed on the wristband to further reduce the chance for confusion when patients, physicians and nurses travel between different hospitals.

The MHA PSO Board clarified that this initiative is *not* meant to encourage hospitals to begin using color-coded patient alert wristbands if a facility currently does not use wristbands. Rather, the initiative’s goal is to gain a 100 percent standardization rate among those Michigan hospitals that currently use color-coded patient alert wristbands.

The MHA PSO will conduct the effort using the same transformational approaches used by the MHA Keystone Center for Patient Safety & Quality that has made the state of Michigan *the* national benchmark for patient safety and quality since 2003. The MHA Keystone Center has been featured in state and national media including *The New England Journal of Medicine* and *The New Yorker* and has been embraced by the World Health Organization headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, as a model program to reduce medical errors in nations across the globe.

“Through the MHA Keystone Center, as well as their individual efforts, Michigan hospitals and health systems lead the nation in advancing patient safety and quality initiatives,” said Spencer Johnson, president of the MHA. “Our hospitals are proud of this achievement and are motivated by continuous improvement as they set the quality bar higher to benefit the patients and the communities they serve.”

In order for the color-coded patient alert wristband initiative to be truly successful, patients and family members need to understand the meaning behind the wristband colors, hospitals officials say.

“If patients have allergies to foods, pollens or medications, they should share that information when admitted,” **LAST NAME** said. “If they have a tendency to lose their balance, they should tell their nurse or physician. And if they have an advance directive, they should let their caregivers know so that their wishes can be honored. Lastly, patients should leave any “social cause” (i.e. Lance Armstrong’s “LIVESTRONG” yellow bracelet) wristbands at home to avoid confusion.”

For more information about **HOSPITAL/HEALTH SYSTEM NAME**'s standardized wristband initiative, please contact **CONTACT NAME/INFO**.

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