

# The Joint Commission visit

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to improve patient care*

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**I**t's one thing to practice Excellence Every Day. It's another to be able to articulate your practice in a way that conveys your knowledge, skill, and compassion. And it's something else entirely to describe your practice to Joint Commission surveyors who are here to assess our ability to provide high-quality care in a safe, clean environment. But that's exactly what staff throughout MGH did the week of April 20th when a team of hospital and lab surveyors arrived for our triennial Joint Commission survey. I was so proud as I witnessed first-hand and heard reports of how eagerly and passionately staff showcased their practice.

Surveyors visited numerous inpatient units on the main campus as well as the Cath Lab, operating rooms, the Emergency Department, Pediatric Hematology/Oncology, Internal Medicine Associates, and satellite locations, including, Mass General/North Shore Center for Outpatient Care in Danvers, MGH Charlestown, the Revere HealthCare Center, and other locations. They conducted individual patient tracers, reviewed our environment of care, and assessed our practices in medication-management, infection-prevention, data-management, emergency management, severe weather readiness, and so much more.

Throughout all practice settings and disciplines, surveyors saw dedication to excellence and a commitment to ongoing learning and improvement. They were generous with their praise, on more than



Jeanette Ives Erickson, RN, senior vice president  
for Patient Care and chief nurse

one occasion identifying an MGH system or process as a best practice, suggesting we publish it in the Joint Commission's on-line library for other hospitals to see.

Perhaps the best way to appreciate the surveyors' assessment of the MGH environment is through their own words. These are just some of the comments we heard: Life safety specialist, Lanny Wier, observed, "Your employees really know the fire procedures cold. Your buildings are exceptionally well-maintained. Everywhere I went was incredibly clean."

Surveyor, Mark Williams, RN, commented, "There was no need to complete an infection-control tracer because during my observations, I saw perfect adherence to isolation precaution practices including the identification of patients, readily available personal protective equipment, and correct use of that equipment by all staff." Mr. Williams

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Overall, the Joint Commission visit was thorough, informative, and extremely positive; it was the most collaborative Joint Commission experience of my entire career. I was happy to see a constructive, respectful exchange of ideas with instances where we learned from them and instances where they learned from us—exactly what an accreditation survey should be.

went on to say, “Your nurses are the best. I was a critical care nurse at the Cleveland Clinic. We took care of very sick patients there, but not to the magnitude I’ve seen here this week at MGH.”

Said surveyor, Kathleen Ostrowski, RN, “Your clinical tracer program focusing on National Patient Safety Goals is remarkable. It’s very unusual for a large academic medical center not to receive findings in this area.”

Surveyor, Rosemarie Pierce, RN, shared, “Massachusetts General Hospital has shown that it is committed to becoming a high-reliability organization. Your entire workforce welcomed our suggestions with enthusiasm.” And, “Your behavioral health program is the best I’ve ever seen. Patients are treated with dignity and respect. Best in the nation.”

Overall, the Joint Commission visit was thorough, informative, and extremely positive; it was the most collaborative Joint Commission experience of my entire career. I was happy to see a constructive, respectful exchange of ideas with instances where we learned from them and instances where they learned from us—exactly what an accreditation survey should be. They were impressed with our knowledge of and adherence to National Patient Safety Goals, blood transfusion practices, plan of care, PRN pain model, inter-disciplinary team approach, and most importantly, the fact that our care is driven by ‘knowing’ the patient.

It would be inconceivable for a hospital of our size and complexity not to have some areas where improvement is warranted. And indeed, surveyors did identify a number of issues, which we’ve grouped in four broad categories:

- Record of care (medical record documentation)
- Environment of care
- Infection control
- Laboratory quality systems assessment

Many of the findings were minor; some have already been corrected; others will be addressed in the coming weeks. We’re in the process of clarifying and finalizing all findings and will work within the allotted time frame to develop and implement corrective action plans.

I think our colleague, John Belknap, director of Compliance, put it best when he said, “This Joint Commission survey was successful, not because of the complimentary comments we heard from surveyors, but because of the great insights they shared about how we can improve practices in some areas. I know we’ll take that feedback and use it to make the excellent care we provide even better.”

Over and above participating in a rigorous accreditation process, the Joint Commission survey was a valuable learning experience. It was overwhelming validation of our Excellence Every Day philosophy and a reminder of why I’m so grateful to work with the best clinicians, support staff, and administrators in the world. Thank-you for your service to our patients and families.

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(Cover photo by Brian Wilson; photo on page 8 by Wally Reeves)