



### “THE CAPTAIN HAS TURNED ON THE SEATBELT SIGN”

By Paul McLeod, M.D., MED3000 Chief Medical Executive



Captain Sully Sullenberger made quite a “splash” (yes, pun intended), at a recent Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society conference and exhibition in Atlanta. A brief overview of his speech is available in the March 4, 2010 publication of Modern Healthcare. To no one’s surprise, his message focused on safety. The airline industry has worked very hard to create their remarkable safety record, and Sully was willing to share some of the reasons for their success. According to the Captain, some common aviation practices could be applied to healthcare to improve patient safety. I

believe these provide some consideration, but I also realize that healthcare involves people, not airplanes.

#### 1. Standardization of equipment and procedures

Study after study documents the differences in the “treatment of choices” by physicians in different geographic areas for patients with the same diagnosis. This is a huge issue without a simple solution. A good example is the treatment of prostate cancer. Men with this disease are often faced with several options that include watchful waiting (no treatment), external radiation, implantable radiation “seeds,” and surgery. Each treatment has its advantages and disadvantages. None of the choices is clearly superior to the others. Many times the decision rests much more with the expertise of the treating physician than the inherent value of the individual treatment.

#### 2. Use of evidence-based checklists

This one comes right out of the book for the airline industry and it works well in medicine. Hospital intensive care units, emergency departments, and operating rooms are much safer when checklists are used on a regular basis. Has someone checked the patient’s wrist band? Are there any allergies? Is blood available? Were the blood thinners stopped prior to surgery? There are important questions that must be asked every time and that will make a huge difference in safety.

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### 3. Development of an industry-wide culture of safety

Safety is a core value in healthcare. What we have not done well, is create the top-down message needed to make this a cultural value. Until we do, it is unattainable.

Patients are not machines, and their response to illness does not depend solely on anatomy or physiology. In addition, the physician is not a mechanic. He or she will need to vary from "standard procedures" on occasion to get the best outcome for the patient. Nonetheless, we have a clear need to improve our safety record. Anything we can learn from industry that can move us closer to eliminating those "preventable" system-based errors will represent a huge victory for medicine and the public we serve.

MED3000 is a partner with our clients in their desire to create a safe environment for patients and employees. We can provide the operational programs and information technology infrastructure to help you accomplish this goal. In the meantime, please remain seated with your seatbelts securely fastened.

*David Burda, "Look to aviation on safety, "Sully" says," Modern Healthcare, March 4, 2010.*

**Power Point**

*"Some common aviation practices could be applied to healthcare to improve patient safety. I believe these provide some consideration, but I also realize that healthcare involves people, not airplanes."*



### Patient Recall

Is your patient volume down? Are your patients neglecting their routine and preventive care? Do you need to reconnect with patients that have not been seen in over a year? Do you need to identify those patients in your practice who should be recalled for needed services? If so, consider using our patient outreach technology, MED3000/Connect. MED3000/Connect can automate the process of identifying those patients in your practice who should be recalled for needed services. If you would like to proactively reach out to your patients with an automated patient recall process, please contact your account manager or Scott Madden at [Scott\\_Madden@MED3000.com](mailto:Scott_Madden@MED3000.com).

The Clinical Advisory is a clinical publication from MED3000 dedicated to informing physicians and clinical staff about tools and information to improve the quality of patient care.

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