

## Office of the Governor

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### News Releases

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### **McGreevey Signs Landmark Law Protecting NJ's Families**

#### *Patient Safety Act Establishes Medical Error Reporting System*

(PERTH AMBOY) –Governor James E. McGreevey today signed landmark legislation designed to improve patient safety and save lives through comprehensive reporting of medical errors by hospitals, nursing homes and other health care facilities.

“As we strive to protect the health of New Jersey’s families, we must first and foremost, ensure the safety of our patients,” said Governor James E. McGreevey. “Today, I am proud to sign into law – the New Jersey Patient Safety Act. This landmark legislation will help keep our families safe by establishing a non-punitive medical error reporting system. It will allow for better reporting; better, more thorough, investigation; and better solutions that keep our families safe.

It empowers health care professionals to do the right thing and come forward to report mistakes. It will help us fix the systemic problems that lead to errors. But most of all, it saves lives.”

The Patient Safety Act (S-557), sponsored by Sen. Joseph F. Vitale (D-Middlesex) and Assemblywoman Loretta Weinberg (D-Hudson), requires health care facilities to report serious, preventable adverse events to the state Department of Health and Senior Services. It also allows anonymous reporting of less serious errors and near misses.

“This law will save lives – it’s that simple,” said Senator Joseph V. Vitale (D-Middlesex). “Today, New Jersey has taken a momentous step to improve patient safety, renewing our commitment and dedication to ensuring that all New Jerseyans are provided with the highest quality of care.”

Governor McGreevey signed the measure into law during a ceremony at Raritan Bay Medical Center in Perth Amboy. Governor McGreevey was joined for the bill signing by

Commissioner of Health and Senior Services Clifton R. Lacy, M.D., Sen. Vitale, and Betsy Ryan, general counsel of the New Jersey Hospital Association.

“Patient safety is one of the hallmarks of the McGreevey administration,” said Health and Senior Services Commissioner Clifton R. Lacy, M.D. “The majority of medical errors occur as a result of problems inherent in complex systems. It is through recognition and understanding of underlying causes that effective preventive measures can be identified and implemented.”

This legislation creates a culture of safety that encourages health care professionals to disclose serious, preventable adverse events within their facilities, where the root causes can be carefully analyzed, as well as to the state Department of Health and Senior Services. It gives health care professionals the legal protection they need to be able to report and more openly discuss medical errors without of litigation.

“The New Jersey Hospital Association has been proud to support legislation that now will require all hospitals to report serious errors and near misses, analyze them in a broader context and make the improvements and changes that will enhance patient safety,” said Gary Carter, president and chief executive officer of the New Jersey Hospital Association.

"Patient safety must be paramount for legislators, doctors, and medical facilities," said Assemblywoman Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen), chairwoman of the Assembly Health and Human Services Committee. "This medical error reporting will not only save lives, it will better enable the medical community to work collaboratively on performance improvements."

Dr. Lacy said the department will analyze the reported data in an effort to identify trends as well as best practices that would be shared with health care professionals and facilities statewide to prevent the future occurrence of similar problems.

“We must understand what, why and how errors occur so that they can be prevented,” said Dr. Lacy.

A 1999 Institute of Medicine report estimated that between 44,000 and 98,000 Americans die every year as a result of preventable medical errors. Medical errors cost the health care industry about 8.8 billion.

State of New Jersey Governor's Office

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