



Safe Patient Project

It's long been clear that patient safety can't be entrusted to the medical profession. Patient advocates—such as Consumer Reports—patients, and their families have to be involved.

Consumer Reports' Safe Patient Project has, for the past 10 years, pushed for improved safety and accountability in U.S. health care, with the goal of reducing medical harm. Our advocates have built a movement of fully engaged consumer activists from 26 states who work together and in their individual communities to make health care safer.

The Safe Patient Project focuses on a few specific issues that contribute to millions of patients ending up sicker than they were when they sought medical care—and more than 400,000 dead each year. Those issues include doctor accountability, medical errors, health care-acquired infections, and hip and knee replacement safety. Here's a look at some of our efforts and achievements on behalf of consumers.

STOP HOSPITAL INFECTIONS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that every year 722,000 patients pick up an infection in the hospital, and 75,000 of them die from it. Hospitals can prevent those infections by taking basic steps that they already know how to do ... but don't.

Since Consumer Reports began the drive to reduce several types of hospital-acquired infections in 2003, we've worked in nearly every state to pass laws requiring public disclosure of infection rates, with 32 states adopting those laws. Even more important,

our state-by-state organizing changed the national debate about patient safety; the federal government now requires all hospitals to report infections. Several of our consumer activists have served as advisers to states and the CDC on efforts to lower infection rates.

The determination is paying off. The

CDC has reported significant reductions between 2008 and 2012 in the types of infections that have been reported over the past several years: central line-associated blood stream infections fell by 44 percent and surgical infections by 20 percent.

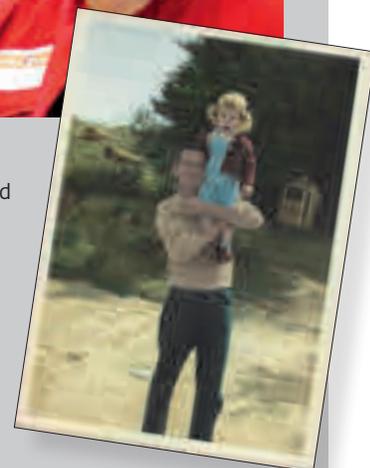
But we're not stopping there. This year, *continued on page 3*

Kathy Day, a retired nurse in Bangor, Maine, became a strong voice for patient safety after her father died of hospital-acquired MRSA in early 2009. Among many things, she works on state legislation to improve tracking and reporting of hospital infections, is a trusted resource for the media, and contributes to national conferences on patient safety.

"If I don't go, and the others who speak up as patients and for patients don't go, the most important and powerful part of any healthcare conference is missing," says Day. "When healthcare executives and leaders meet in exclusive, expensive conferences without patients, just exactly what are they accomplishing? We patients often make leaders very uncomfortable, but we keep the conversations real and honest, and isn't that exactly why we are there?"

Day's tenacity has earned her the Maine Quality Counts Patient Partnership Award. She's become a seasoned and savvy advocate for all patients, and is the perfect example of what the Consumer Reports network has been able to foster, learning from CR staff as well as from other advocates and from her own experiences.

Kathy Day has advocated for patient safety since her father, John P. McCleary, died of an infection he got in the hospital. Day as a girl, with her father at Millinocket Lake, Maine in 1951.



(Re)Building a Better CR



The Rebuild Team in the Rebuild room ... rebuilding Consumer Reports.

Over the past several months W3-3, a nondescript meeting room on the third floor of CR's headquarters in Yonkers, has been transformed from an occasionally used place for routine staff functions into an exciting hub of activity and innovation. The recently organized "Rebuild" team has semi-permanently encamped there and over the course of a typical ten-hour day they meet and engage with an assortment of CR experts. Their mandate is significant: bringing a better and more interactive Consumer Reports to you. Walking by, we've gotten used to seeing a couple of dozen animated people, some standing, some sitting; at computers or feverishly writing on whiteboards; conversing and arguing; or deep in thought.

Their ultimate goal is to make sure that we provide the most up-to-date information and best possible user experience for every CR user. It's an unprecedented effort to apply our legendary product knowledge and testing ability to address the real concerns of our constituency. Whether you consider yourself an average consumer, something of a techie, or a full-fledged geek, we have what you are looking for. The team's challenge has been to combine CR's marketplace wisdom and decades-old product-testing experience with the personalized service that consumers expect in the digital age. We are ensuring that the values espoused in our first issue of May 1936, to

empower consumers with the knowledge to protect themselves and ensure a safe marketplace, will stay relevant for whatever high-tech developments the future holds.

Cara Determan, Director of User Experience and project leader, says, "We are at a crossroads. We need to reimagine the CR experience in light of what consumers really want. What we are accomplishing with 'Rebuild. Reboot.' will make us the best in a rapidly changing and highly competitive marketplace."

Taking the journey together

On any given day in the Rebuild Room you might find an electronics engineer, web developer, software specialist and TV expert sitting next to and learning from one another. That cross-functional approach results in incredible collaborative effort and cooperation. The experts are all in the same room and on the same page, having the same conversation in real time, trying to find the best solutions to your problems so we can respond to your needs as quickly as possible.

The project is initially focusing on cellphones, TV's and computers, all rapidly and constantly evolving products essential to the pace of modern life. Unfortunately, those devices can be inscrutable to the uninitiated or casual user, both in terms of which product to buy and how to use it when you take it home. Rather than guess what you want or presume what you ought to know, the rebuild team adopted a new approach. Dubbed "walk a mile," it has made the team more empathetic with consumers and better equipped to present CR information in a more meaningful and informative way. It's a simple but mindset-altering concept that begins as a listening exercise.

Getting to know you

Here's one example of how it works: After interviewing scores of customers about their experiences with cell phones, we were able to determine the "pain points" in the customer's journey. Confusion and anxiety arose from numerous sources including the overwhelming variety and complexity of cell phone features, and difficulty in understanding and comparing usage plans.

Equipped with first-hand knowledge the team then left the com-



Project leader Cara Determan guiding data analysis.

fort of their offices and ventured into the mystifying world of electronics retailers. Their mission: to buy products just as you would. Despite their pre-shopping research using the latest CR information—and the insights they’ve gleaned from working in the very building where the products are tested and the experts are embedded—they felt like the typical consumer: befuddled and bullied by fast-talking salesmen and bewildering product specs. So when the time came to actually buy a phone, they were unsure of which product would best suit their needs. Smart shopping was a much more difficult and less enjoyable endeavor than anticipated.

Those humbling excursions reinforced the realization that we need you, our readers and supporters, to help us become better. Once the staff “walked a mile in your shoes,” their approach to the best way to present information to consumers was transformed. They understood the importance of matching our research with

your needs. They realized the futility of trying to figure out what your problem might be. Lab work is essential but so is the input of real consumers. We are listening to what you say because you are telling us how we can help you. You are asking the questions and pointing out the problems, so we can find the answers. That means staying with you through your research and shopping, and then helping you use and maintain the product.

That project was the genesis for a new app called CrowdSignal that sources user reviews of cell phone carriers and enables consumers to share information and experiences that can be enriched by CR’s expertise. Ultimately, that approach and the redesign will increase the relevancy and utility of our product ratings. In the short term, similar projects are planned for other electronics (we are currently working on TVs) and what we learn will help us redesign our product assessments and the way information is presented in our reporting. ■

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we’re continuing the push to expand federal reporting and to connect those reported results with Medicare payment adjustments that reward the safest care and penalize the poorest. Consumer Reports’ advocacy has been instrumental in getting infection rates tied to payments, which will begin by the end of 2014. We’re also encouraging the use of infection data by media and local groups, since it’s clear that the more information people have, the more committed they are to confronting the problem. And, while Consumer Reports will continue to represent the consumer voice on state and national committees looking at medical harm, we’re also working to strengthen the consumer voice by getting Safe Patient Project activists appointed to those committees.

HIP AND KNEE IMPLANT WARRANTIES

Going shopping? The car you drive to get there is warranted (three years), the blender you buy is warranted (two years), the cell phone you call home on is warranted (one year). The knee you walk in on? Nope. No warranty at all. You’re on your own, buster.

Hip and knee replacement surgeries are becoming increasingly common; there were nearly 1.2 million of these surgeries in the U.S. in 2011, and the number is expected to reach 4 million a year by 2030.

Our newest Safe Patient Project campaign is calling national attention to the fact that, with the exception of one device, manufacturers of hip and knee implants do

not warranty their products. It’s one of the most expensive and important products you’re ever likely to buy, and because it’s implanted in the body, you’d expect the highest standard for safety and durability. If a device fails, it likely will require revision surgery, which is both painful and costly. Those costs should not fall on patients, their insurance companies, or Medicare, but rather on the maker of the faulty product.

More than 750,000 Americans got metal-on-metal hip implants over the past decade. The devices were supposed to last longer than those made with ceramic and plastic, but unusually high failure rates have been documented in metal hip implants in Australia, England, and Wales, where devices are tracked through national registries. Many thousands of Americans’ metal-on-metal implants also have failed.

We’re urging device manufacturers to stand behind their products by taking responsibility for the associated costs if they fail, break, or are otherwise defective. We believe that:

- Patients have a right to know how long companies are willing to stand behind their implant products.
- Warranties will improve the safety and performance of devices, by adding more accountability on the part of manufacturers who operate in an environment of less-than-rigorous approval process and weak post-market monitoring.

- Warranties will provide a clear process to consumers for replacing a failed device.

Consumers Union recently gathered personal stories from nearly 3,000 patients who have had hip and knee replacements. We found that many people don’t know key details about their device, such as the make and model of their implant or the number of years they should expect their hip or knee replacement to last.

We’re asking manufacturers to tell their customers how long they are willing to warranty hip and knee implant products. The manufacturer should provide documents regarding the warranty with the product, to be given to the patient as part of the implant procedure. The warranty should cover full replacement costs of implants that fail, including “labor” costs. When implants break, crack, cease to function as intended, or emit toxins into the body, the manufacturer should step up and replace them.

Also in the medical device area, in 2012, our campaign brought the consumer and patient voice into an industry-dominated Congressional debate, resulting in marking medical implants with unique numbers so recalls and safety problems can be more accurately tracked. Congressional debate about medical-device safety will come up again in 2017 and our work now will ensure an even stronger consumer voice then. ■

If you’d like to share your story about a hip or knee implant, please go to <https://stori.es/share/your-joint-replacement-experience>

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Great News: CR's Next President



The Board of Directors of Consumer Reports is excited to announce that Marta Tellado has been selected as the next President and Chief Executive Officer of CR. Marta comes to us from the Ford Foundation

where she served as Vice President of Global Communications and Information Management. Please join us in welcoming Marta to the CR family. You'll hear more about her vision for Consumer Reports' future in our next issue. ■



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