PressGaney

Healing without harm: Safety culture trends 2023

Executive leadership and senior management must reinforce safety as a nonnegotiable core value and improve the workforce's perceptions of safety and care at the organizational level.

a **PG Forsta** company

About the data

Press Ganey's safety culture data reflects the voices of 813,900 healthcare workers—including clinical professionals, nurses, advanced practice providers, physicians, clerical workers, licensed technical workers, security team members, skilled maintenance professionals, midlevel management, nonclinical professionals, and senior management—from 194 systems and 3,279 facilities. The trends in our 2022 data highlight key insights that should shape how organizations approach safety culture in 2023.

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These trends highlight key insights that should **shape how organizations approach safety culture** moving forward.

Executive summary

National Press Ganey safety culture data from 2022 reveals four trends warranting the attention of boards, CEOs, and senior executives in the healthcare industry:

1 For the *third straight year*, **senior management perceptions of safety culture continue to decline across all domains**.

2 For the *second year*, **physicians perceive declines across all domains of safety culture**.

3 While employees perceive improvement in safety culture at the department level, **they don't perceive improvement at the broader organizational level.**

4 Employees noted **improvements in staffing, teamwork, communication, and job stress**.

The following report provides key recommended actions to improve your safety culture in 2023, which include:

☑ **Commit to safety as a core value** and leverage daily leader behaviors to reinforce safety in word and deed.

☑ **Leverage ongoing pulse measurement** of safety culture, and dive deeper into groups with lower safety perceptions to drive understanding.

☑ **Ensure robust analysis of safety events** and near misses with transparent communication about safety issues and actions implemented to prevent harm.

Safety culture trends shaping 2023

Culture—the shared values, behaviors, expectations, and collective actions and interactions of employees—is the most powerful driver of organizational outcomes. Culture is a variable over which the board, CEO, and senior leaders have ultimate influence. In many organizations, culture is left unattended with variability in values, behavior expectations, and individual and team actions. Yet, when deliberately managed, culture is your greatest asset, powering results in day-to-day operations and enabling resilience in times of crisis.

Before the onset of COVID-19, national perceptions of safety culture had been improving year over year, albeit by small increments. But in 2020, they worsened, as the pandemic spread and healthcare organizations were burdened with unprecedented financial pressures, staffing shortages, and disrupted supply chains. The prolonged effects of COVID-19 led to further declines in safety culture in 2021.

Safety culture results in 2022 are marked by variation in perceptions according to role—in particular continued decline in perceptions of senior managers and physicians, as well a decline in employee perception of Pride & Reputation at the organizational level. Positive changes, however, were noted among the Resources & Teamwork domain at the department and team level. These trends are explored further below.

Senior management perceptions of safety continue to see declines across all domains—and this impacts everyone else.

Senior management perception across all safety culture domains continues on a downward trajectory: –0.04 decline in Overall Safety, –0.02 in Prevention & Reporting, –0.05 in Pride & Reputation, and –0.04 in Resources & Teamwork. Senior management safety culture scores are typically higher than those of operational management, suggesting a more positive perspective among those at the highest levels of provider organizations. Yet the continued downward trajectory of senior management scores stands out as significant.

Nationally, senior management scores also have continued to decline in Press Ganey metrics of Engagement (–0.03) and Resilience (–0.01).

Yearly trends: Management

NATIONAL DATABASE AVERAGE

| Management | Senior management |

Overall Safety   Prevention & Reporting   Pride & Reputation   Resources & Teamwork
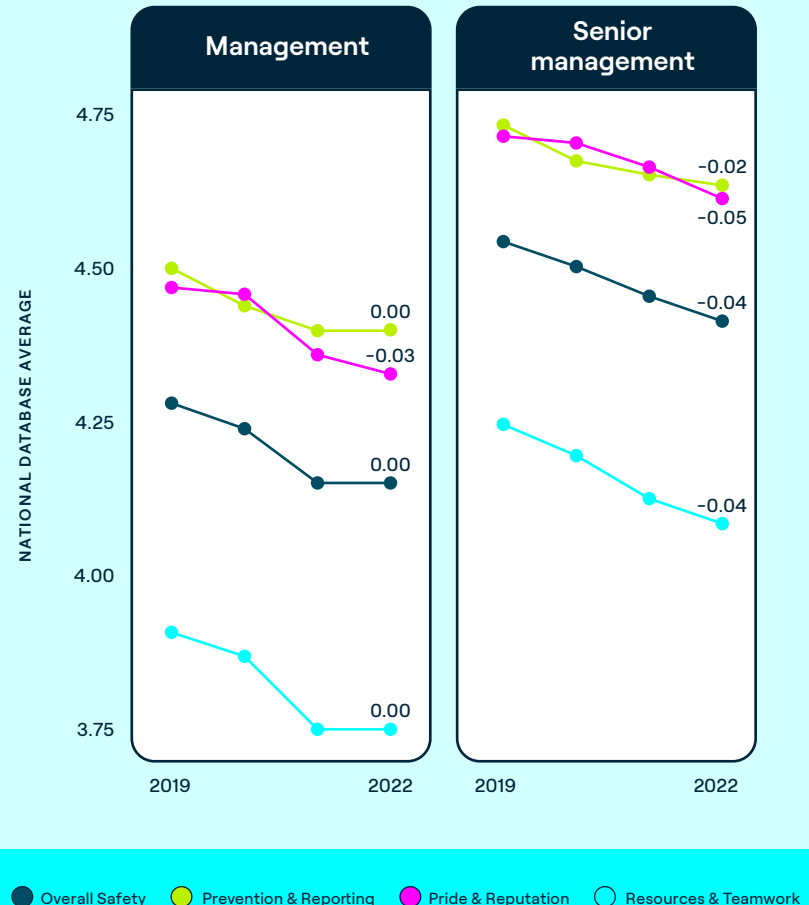
Physicians also saw a decline across all domains of safety culture.

Most notably, the domain with the largest decline for physicians was Pride & Reputation with a –0.12 drop from 2021 to 2022. Physician perceptions declined –0.06 in Overall Safety composite, –0.03 in Prevention & Reporting, and –0.05 in Resources & Teamwork. The safety culture module trends have larger declines than the other major physician perception metrics, such as Engagement and Decompression—most notably in the Pride & Reputation subtheme, which includes several of the senior management/organization-related questions.

Yearly trends: Clinical staff - Physician

Physician

NATIONAL DATABASE AVERAGE

● Overall Safety   ○ Prevention & Reporting   ● Pride & Reputation   ○ Resources & Teamwork
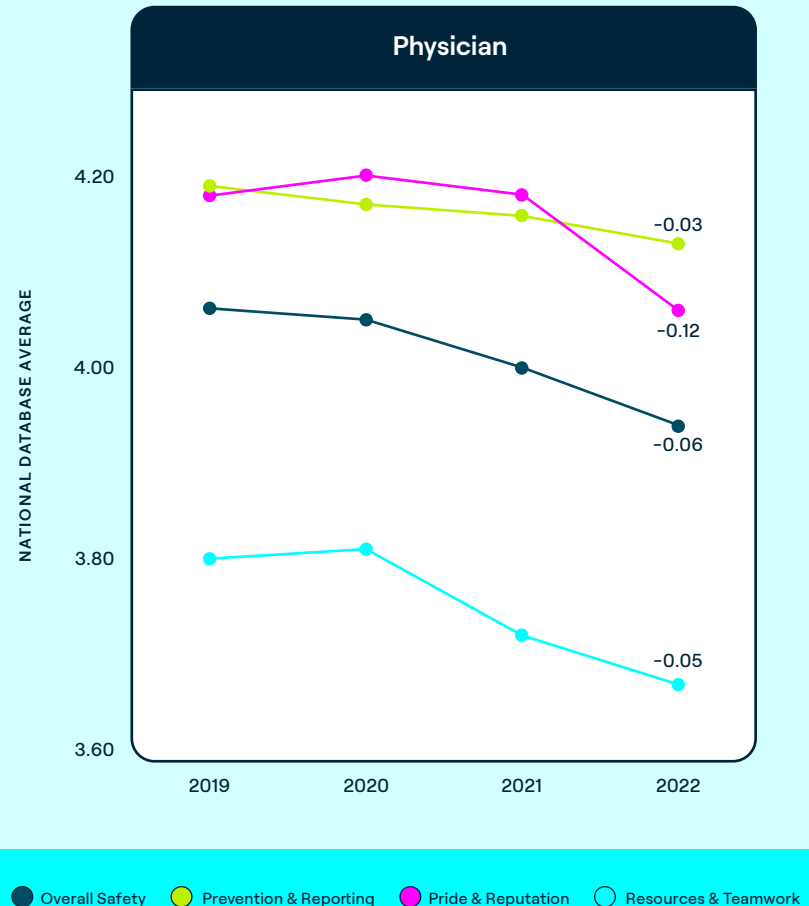
The workforce overall perceives improvement in safety culture at the department and team level, but does not perceive improvement in safety culture at the organizational level.

In the domain of Prevention & Reporting, improvements were seen in team members' perceptions of the following: employees/manager promotion of a safe workplace, nonpunitive response to mistake reporting, and discussing safety concerns and error prevention. However, the Pride & Reputation domain shows a decline in team member perception regarding senior leader promotion of safety and overall safety. Furthermore, fewer employees today say they would recommend their organization for care than in previous years.

Safety culture items, 2022 vs. 2021

Pride & Reputation continues to decline, but the data shows improvements elsewhere.

CHANGE IN NATIONAL AVERAGE: 2022 VS. 2021

PREVENTION & REPORTING

Item	Change
Emp/mgr. work toward safe workplace	+0.02
Mistake reporting is nonpunitive	+0.02
My team discusses error prevention	+0.01
Can raise workplace safety concerns	+0.01
Org is improving patient safety	0.00
Mistakes lead to positive changes	0.00
Emp speak up re: poor patient care	0.00
Can report mistakes without fear	-0.02

PRIDE & REPUTATION

Item	Change
Org provides high-quality care	0.00
Org delivers safe, error-free care	-0.01
Sr. mgt. promotes patient safety	-0.01
Recommend this org for care	-0.02

RESOURCES & TEAMWORK

Item	Change
Reasonable amount of job stress	+0.07
Adequate dept staffing	+0.06
Teamwork within unit	+0.04
Effective communication between units	+0.02
Comm. between phys/nurses/med personnel	+0.01
Collaboration between depts	+0.01
Effective physician-nurse teamwork	0.00

*Calendar-year data based on Press Ganey's National Healthcare Database
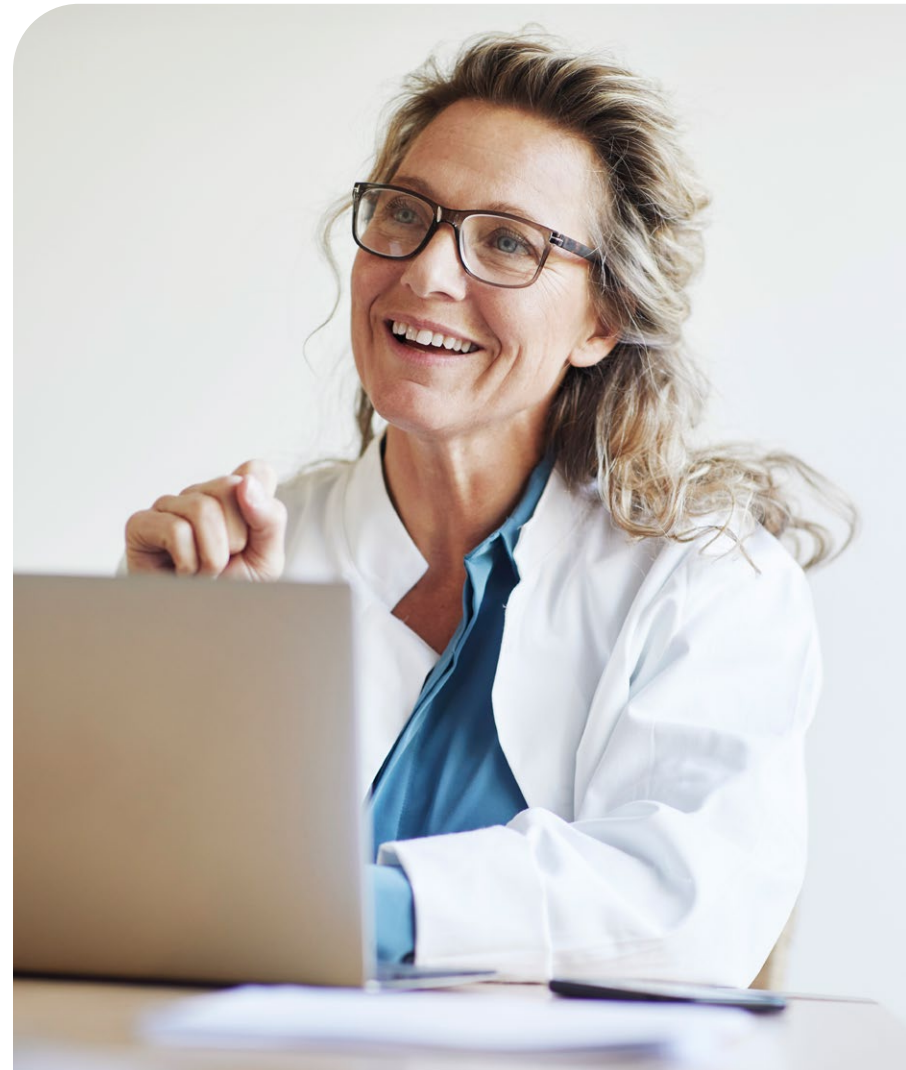
The power of small changes

A small change in decile point score can result in significant changes in percentile ranking. For organizations at the 50th percentile, a score drop of 0.02 points would make them fall 2–4 percentile ranks across the various safety culture module items. A larger drop of 0.04 points would drop organizations at the 50th percentile 4–8 percentile ranks.

Employees overall perceived improvement in Resources & Teamwork, and this was reflected by most categories of clinical and nonclinical employees.

As seen in the trends graphs based on position, most clinical workers, with the exception of physicians, saw modest yet statistically significant improvements related to job stress, department staffing, teamwork, communication, and interdepartmental collaboration. Since early 2020, healthcare organizations have been laser-focused on responding to COVID-19, along with the associated challenges of nurse burnout and unprecedented staffing shortages. There have been significant leadership and organizational efforts to address these challenges, and this recent data suggests that it's having a positive impact. However, it is worrisome that physicians—the de facto leaders in provider organizations—are not experiencing the same recovery.
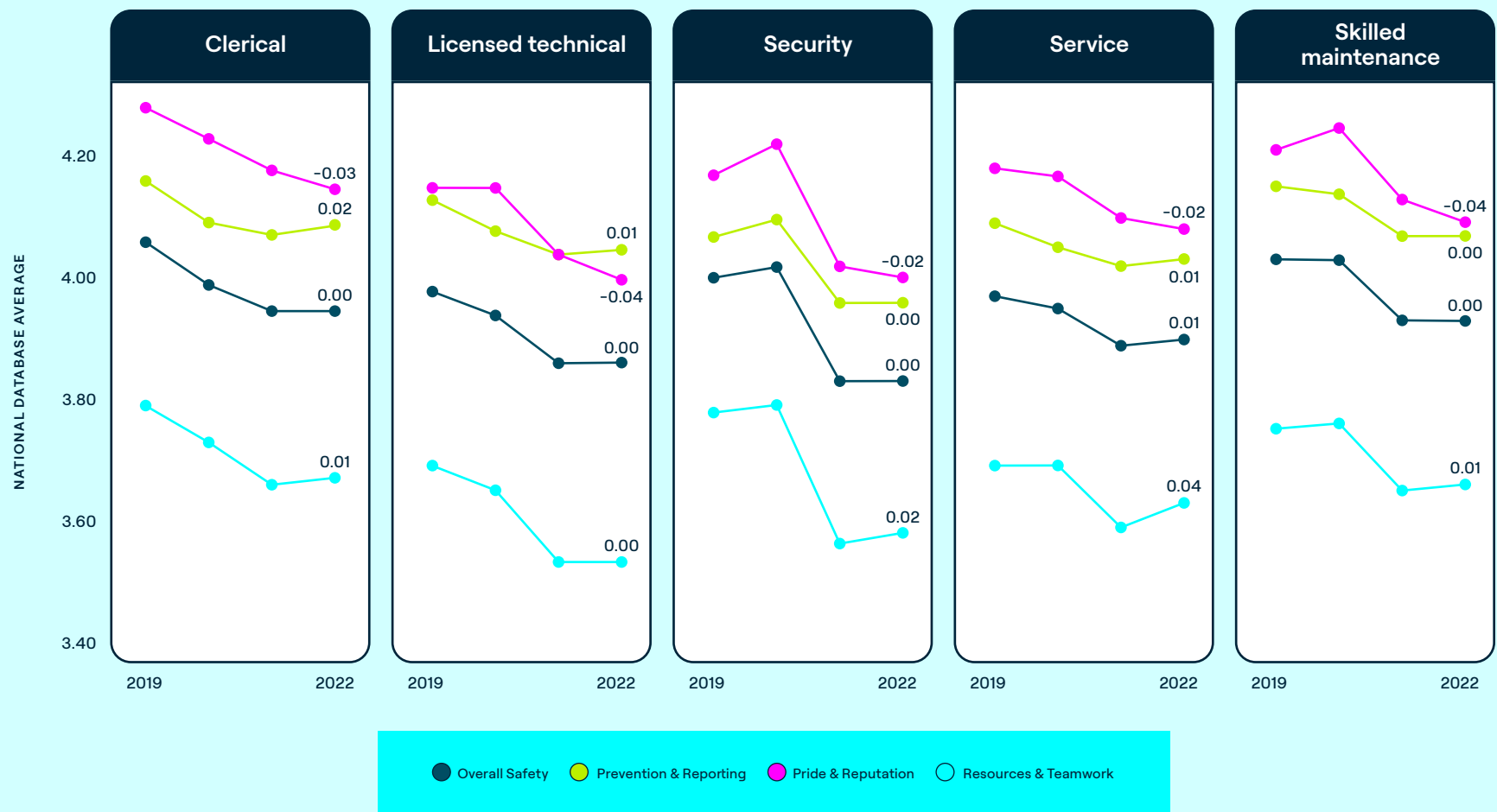
Yearly trends: Clinical staff - All positions

NATIONAL DATABASE AVERAGE

Advanced practice provider
- -0.08
- -0.02
- -0.01
- 0.01

Clinical professional
- 0.02
- -0.03
- 0.02
- 0.04

Non-MD advanced degree
- 0.00
- -0.02
- -0.01
- -0.02

Nursing – Other
- 0.01
- 0.03
- 0.04
- 0.06

Nursing – RN
- 0.00
- -0.05
- 0.00
- 0.02

Physician
- -0.03
- -0.12
- -0.06
- -0.05

4.20
4.00
3.80
3.60

2019   2022   2019   2022   2019   2022   2019   2022

● Overall Safety   ● Prevention & Reporting   ● Pride & Reputation   ○ Resources & Teamwork

Fewer employees today say they would recommend their organization for care than in previous years.

Yearly trends: Service - All positions

NATIONAL DATABASE AVERAGE

Clerical
- -0.03
- 0.02
- 0.00
- 0.01

4.20
4.00
3.80
3.60
3.40

2019 — 2022

Licensed technical
- 0.01
- -0.04
- 0.00
- 0.00

2019 — 2022

Security
- -0.02
- 0.00
- 0.00
- 0.02

2019 — 2022

Service
- -0.02
- 0.01
- 0.01
- 0.04

2019 — 2022

Skilled maintenance
- -0.04
- 0.00
- 0.00
- 0.01

2019 — 2022

● Overall Safety ● Prevention & Reporting ● Pride & Reputation ○ Resources & Teamwork

3 actions for senior leaders to create and manage safety culture

As the industry continues to grapple with an ongoing pandemic and permanent changes to healthcare, healthcare organizations must refocus on the core, and recommit to a culture of safety. While leaders do many things of importance, the attention and work of leaders in defining culture arguably has the greatest influence on outcomes. Culture begins with clearly defined values and beliefs; values and beliefs shape behaviors; and behaviors drive outcomes. Below are three key actions for the board, CEO, and senior leaders in creating and managing safety culture.

1 Commit to safety as a core value and leverage daily leader behaviors to reinforce safety in word and deed.

When safety is considered a core value, it is so embedded in the culture that it informs everything the organization does. And working toward the goal of zero harm requires broadening the lens to include physical harm as well as emotional harm for patients and team members alike, across the entire continuum of care.

The goal is to breathe life into the commitment to safety and zero harm so the commitment shapes the actions, interactions, and decision making of every team member. The following are three high-impact daily leader behaviors that the board, CEO, and other senior leaders can take to influence safety culture:

— **Start every meeting with a brief "safety moment."** Taking time to reflect on safety and harm prevention does two important things: (1) It conveys the first-focus priority of safety, and (2) it keeps "safety first" top of mind for ourselves and others.

— **When decisions are made, ask: "What impact does this decision have on safety?"** Actions and decisions sometimes have the unintended consequence of negatively impacting the safety of patients and/or the workforce. The simple act of asking the question keeps safety in the game when decisions are made and prevents unknowingly compromising the commitment to zero harm.

— **Engage daily with the front lines.** Taking just five minutes to connect with a front-line team member about safety sets the tone for zero harm as a leadership priority. Ask about barriers to delivering safe care, and encourage team members to speak up about safety issues. Always make a special effort to say "thank you" to any team member who stops the line for safety or is part of a safety success story. Word about your safety-first visits will spread. And, more importantly, behaviors that advance safety first will, too.

2 **Leverage ongoing pulse measurement of safety culture, and dive deeper into groups with lower safety perceptions to drive understanding.**

Keep your finger on the pulse of safety culture by measuring key elements of safety culture throughout the year. Complement annual safety culture measurement with periodic pulse checks, specifically in the two areas of "leader messaging about safety" and "just culture," to regularly gauge employees' perceptions of safety and improvements. In addition, participate regularly in daily safety check-ins, such as huddles and rounding, to get a firsthand picture of front-line safety concerns.

The trends for physicians and senior managers are concerning, as they are leaders in the organization that will drive and sustain culture. Understanding the reasons for their continued decline is essential. Dive deeper into this area with focus groups, crowdsourcing, pulse surveys, and other tools to identify behaviors, systems and processes that need improvement. In the meantime, make sure to recognize leaders for the improvements that have occurred, particularly in Resources & Teamwork— positive reinforcement of these gains can reinforce and sustain the efforts.

3 **Ensure robust analysis of safety events and near misses with transparent communication about safety issues and actions implemented to prevent harm.**

Front-line staff need to see and feel organizational and leader commitment to quality and safety. A critical way to accomplish this is to ensure that when safety events or near misses occur, there are strong processes to report events easily, analyze those events using high reliability and human factors principles, and then drive concrete actions for improvement. The final piece is transparency—communicate the lessons learned and improvements implemented, so that front-line staff and clinicians see that these events are taken seriously. And that by learning from these events, there is real commitment to harm prevention.

Press Ganey Safety & Reliability Center of Excellence:

Industry-leading solutions powering zero harm in safety and the Human Experience

Press Ganey is the industry's only single-source partner for safety and reliability solutions, with expertise in guiding health systems in safety and reliability optimization. These key solutions support the recommendations offered in the insights report:

Click here to learn more about Press Ganey's safety and reliability solutions. To take a tour of our virtual Press Ganey Reliability Centers of Excellence community, watch this quick video.

1 Commit to safety as a core value and leverage daily leader behaviors to reinforce safety in word and deed.

— Safety and high reliability consulting and executive coaching

— High reliability rounding

2 Leverage ongoing pulse measurement of safety culture, and dive deeper into groups with lower safety perceptions to drive understanding.

— Safety culture survey and micropulse

— Crowdsourcing

— Digital focus groups

3 Ensure robust analysis of safety events and near misses with transparent communication about safety issues and actions implemented to prevent harm.

— High Reliability Platform (HRP) for event reporting, event cause analysis, action management, and lessons learned

— Press Ganey's Patient Safety Organization for cross-industry learning and sharing

Conclusion

The improvements made in Resources & Teamwork and Prevention & Reporting are promising and reflect the robust efforts of organizations to counteract the impacts of the pandemic—but those improvements need senior leadership's commitment to—and focus on—safety in order to be sustained. The declines across all domains in senior management and physicians signal an imperative to recommit to zero harm as a core value and message on it every day—and back that message up with actions.

Supercharge your safety culture

Press Ganey's safety and reliability solutions—including our High Reliability Platform, Patient Safety Organization, safety culture survey, and team of safety consultants—are highly effective in driving safety culture improvements. To learn more, reach out at:

pressganey.com/request-a-demo

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