Health Information Technology, Usability, and Patient Safety

- An oversight framework for patient safety and health information technology requires national focus and public and private sector collaboration and leadership. AMIA believes that an adverse event reporting system should be established to help assure the ongoing safety and benefit of the use of health information technology.
- AMIA supports the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) recommendations promoting an oversight Framework for Patient Safety and Health Information Technology.

Health IT and Patient Safety. Given the potential impact of health information technology (health IT) to not only improve healthcare delivery but on rare occasions to inadvertently cause patient harm, it is critical to coordinate and accelerate the efforts underway focusing on the issue of electronic health record (EHR) usability. While HIT offers opportunities to improve reliability and to enhance safety, its potential to contribute to complexity in terms of workflow and work processes needs to be considered.

AMIA’s Usability Task Force. AMIA convened an interdisciplinary team of researchers, practitioners and scholars from diverse stakeholder organizations including academia, industry, and providers. The team produced a report addressing key issues regarding usability, and patient safety. AMIA’s recommendations help focus attention on critical usability issues that can adversely affect patient safety and the quality of care:
- Establish an adverse event reporting system for health IT-related adverse event reporting
- Accelerate the research agenda to support broad adoption of improved usability practices among EHR developers and users
- Develop a core set of measures for adverse events related to health IT use
- Develop a common user interface style guide for select EHR functionalities
- Perform formal usability assessments on patient safety-sensitive EHR functionalities
- Include usability concerns in terminology standardization and interoperability across EHR systems
- Develop and disseminate an educational campaign on the safe and effective use of EHR
- Adopt best practices for EHR system implementation and ongoing management

Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC). AMIA participated in the BPC’s collaborative effort to develop a set of principles and recommendations for an oversight framework for assuring patient safety in health IT. The framework protects patient safety, is risk-based, promotes innovation, is flexible, leverages existing quality and patient safety–related systems and processes, avoids regulatory duplication, and has the support of experts and stakeholders across every sector of health care. The report contains a set of principles and recommendations calling for a risk-based, flexible framework that both protects patient safety and promotes continued innovation in health IT:
- Any oversight framework for safety should recognize and support the important role that health IT plays in improving the quality, safety, and cost-effectiveness of care, as well as the patient’s experience of care.
- Assuring patient safety, as well as enabling positive patient outcomes, is a shared responsibility that must involve the entire health care system.
- Any framework for patient safety in health IT should be risk-based, flexible, and not stifle innovation.
- Existing safety and quality-related processes, systems, and standards should be leveraged for patient safety in health IT.
- Reporting of patient safety events related to health IT is essential; a non-punitive environment should be established to encourage reporting, learning, and improvement.